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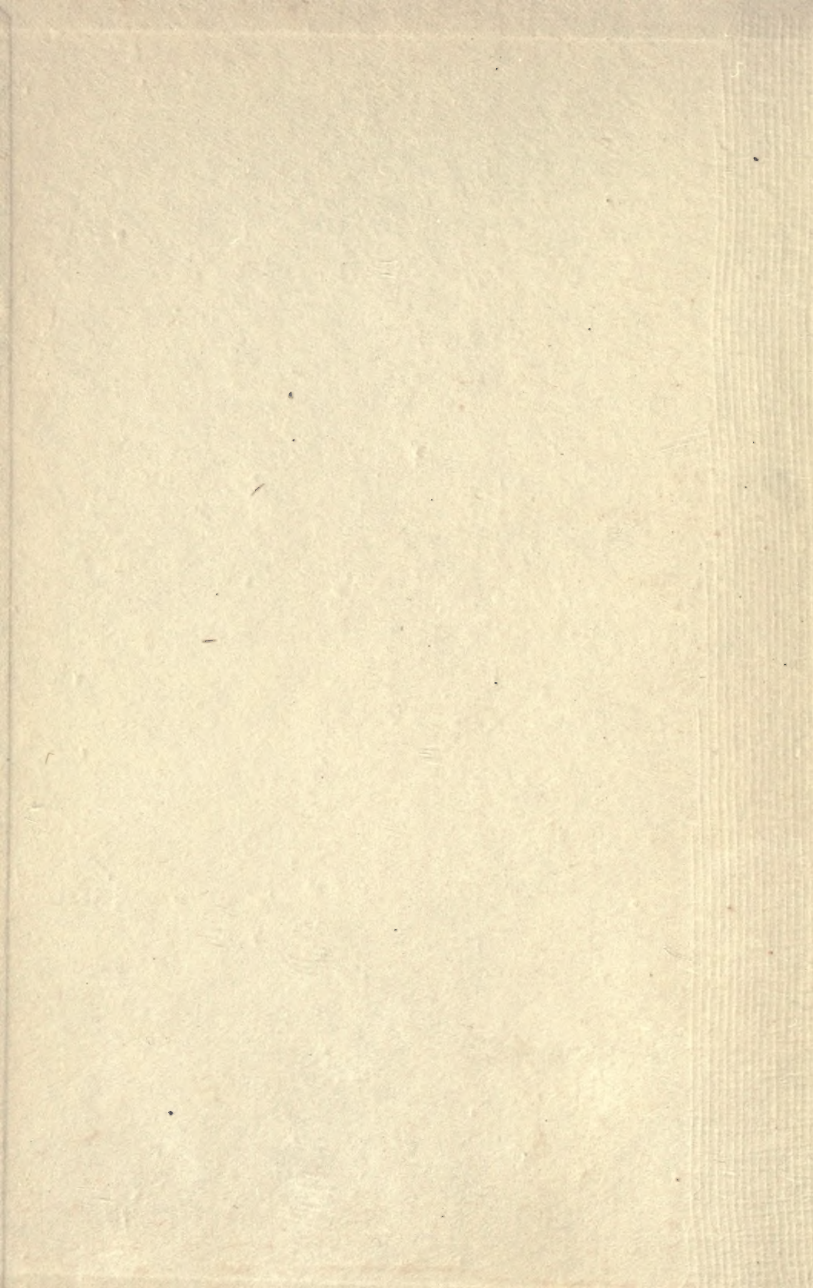


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# A MUSICAL PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

BY  
J.D.M. RORKE








Dear M<sup>iss</sup> Andras.

With love from

Elaine.

Christmas 1923.



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A MUSICAL PILGRIM'S  
PROGRESS

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# A MUSICAL PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

BY

J. D. M. RORKE

WITH A PREFACE BY

ERNEST WALKER, D. MUS.

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TO  
S. N. C.





## PREFACE

IT is some few years since I had the pleasure of beginning a correspondence-acquaintance with the writer of this book, who has asked that occasional fragments from my letters might be resuscitated in his own pages: I have not edited them in any way, and they should be taken as mere *currente calamo* observations, that I might perhaps now be inclined in some respects slightly to qualify. Not that I wish to repudiate my signature, but Mr. Rorke is, I am sure, the last person to wish to pin any one down with undue tightness.

I have read *A Musical Pilgrim's Progress*, usually with cordial agreement, occasionally with slight dissent, and always with genuinely keen interest; it seems to me a new sort of book, full of artistic insight arrestingly expressed. To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Rorke has broken fresh ground: not only fresh, but also fruitful. The psychological development of the amateur (*amator*, the lover-as-such) set down, as in these pages, in candour and without convention, by one who can transform his musical enthusiasms into articulate literature—here is surely matter both of moment and of attractiveness to all for whom music is more than the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal.

Mr. Rorke addresses a modest challenge to other music-lovers to follow in his steps, and as he has asked me to write a preface to his book, I am perhaps bound to accept the challenge, though with a full and lively realization of the fact that my evolution has been nothing like so respectable as his. *Horresco referens*, indeed; but I suppose I must obey.

Peering into the mists that have gathered during the course

of nearly half a century, I seem to discern, as the first objects of my whole-hearted musical affections, two grisly phantoms known respectively as a *Marche des troubadours* by Henri Roubier and a *Gondellied* by Theodor Oesten: I have not been afflicted with a closer sight of either for years, but I have a vague impression, possibly unfounded, that the latter was slightly the less discreditable acquaintance, and a more definite impression that I loved the former rather the more ardently. No doubt I was a very small boy, but that is no comfort to me: I have known hosts of children of the same age who would scorn such low tastes. And the painful visions by no means cease there. I seem to remember, a little later, playing Beethoven's F sharp major Sonata and Thalberg's 'Home, Sweet Home' at one and the same concert (how appallingly I must have maltreated the former of this unholy yoked pair), and—quite certainly, I fear—wallowing in a new song about an Old Brigade (by one Odoardo Barri, if I recollect rightly) with extreme intensity of pleasure—I made a special point for a while of hearing the wretched thing whenever I could. And then came years during which I had, with queer indiscrimination, simultaneous enthusiasms for respectable and quite disrespectable things. I had what I know now to have been the inestimable advantage of steeping myself in the daily orchestral concerts at the Crystal Palace in August Manns's prime; but I must sorrowfully confess that an effusion called a Turkish Patrol, by one Michaelis—these details must have been deeply rooted to have stuck so vividly in my mind—that I often heard from the military band in the centre transept, gave me, for some time, at least as keen delight as anything I heard in the more select part of the Palace. Later, in my undergraduate days, I kept a more or less regular musical diary: most of its entries read fairly decently, but I know very well, though I never committed the fact to paper till now, that for a quite considerable while some of my crowning emotional ecstasies were infallibly evoked by Stainer's Seven-

fold Amen. Mr. Rorke began with Chopin without any of these horrible strayings ; but having now abased myself in the dust, let me try if I cannot get a little more even with him in recalling the more creditable features of my evolution.

There is an ancient Oxford story of an undergraduate who, being requested to specify the minor prophets, replied that it was not for him to make invidious distinctions among holy men ; and similarly, in naming the great names, I am as far as Mr. Rorke is from any desire to draw up judicial class-lists. Roughly chronological landmarks, so far as I can recall them, were the fourteenth of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, Beethoven's C sharp minor Sonata and, very markedly but later, *Leonora No. 3* (I invariably choked at the climax of the coda), Chopin's G major Nocturne, the *Warum* of Schumann (a very powerful long-sustained influence), Schubert's C major Symphony, the *Lohengrin* Prelude, the *Les Préludes* symphonic poem of Liszt (a merely meteoric force), and the *Liebestreu* and *Von ewiger Liebe* of Brahms, who appeared suddenly with a vehement attack. Of Bach I knew little, and that did not appeal much : at Mozart I rather sniffed. *Horresco referens*, again. It seems, perhaps, a queer hotch-potch of positives and negatives ; but somehow I fancy I see a thread running through it all, a thread that, after many more twistings and turnings, I still hold in my hand unbroken. But I doubt if I should have thought of it in this way at all if Mr. Rorke had not made me.

Change is, I suppose, the law of music as well as of life ; and we have to prove all things (and there are certainly plenty of them) before we can quite know how to hold fast that which is good. I whole-heartedly agree with Mr. Rorke about the greatness of *La Cathédrale engloutie*, but I recall as vividly as if it were a matter of yesterday my complete bewilderment when this new planet swam into my ken : there seemed to be nothing in my musical world with which to correlate it. But now it seems far more plain-sailing than some things which



I have known twice as long. And so, when one's pupils bring compositions that appear at a first glance to read equally well upside down, one must not too hastily conclude that that is the last word to be said about them. Another generation is evolving in its turn; and, after all, it has escaped from the *Marche des troubadours*.

Which is, to the best of my conscientiousness, my outlined answer to Mr. Rorke's challenge; and I now leave the field to him.

ERNEST WALKER.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE Author has reasons for gratitude to Dr. Walker that are out of the common, having profited by an accessibility and a generous helpfulness on his part, such as a stranger personally, and an ignorant amateur musically, had no right to expect. It would not be easy in any place, and it is impossible here, to make adequate acknowledgement of a kindness which has been always unfailing in response, and whose latest evidence is the Preface to this book.

J. D. M. R.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PART ONE . . . . .	1
PART TWO . . . . .	23
PART THREE . . . . .	47
INDEX OF COMPOSERS AND MUSIC MENTIONED	93



# PART ONE

## § 1

IF some one else had written it, I should be intensely interested in a record of the sort this sets out to be. I mean a brief musical autobiography, describing sincerely from the beginning one's successive impressions and adventures, and discussing, not in the abstract, but on the basis of an actual individual experience, the nature of the appeal of different composers and different kinds of music. I meet musical people and hear them speak of far-off days when there was no name for them but Wagner, and see them at present subsisting on a diet of Mozart, that 'pure milk of the word', with, perhaps, large gobbets of modern Russian floating therein. Surely they have a tale to tell.

If any one wants to see music in perspective, and have its stars orientated, he must read the history of music. The history of music tells you who came after whom, and what developments he made in the sonata or in harmony or in the resources of orchestration; which it is indeed very profitable to know. But I don't see why the relative position of the composers should be discussed only round their significance for form, and the progress of form. There must be some unifying principle, but why should that not be, frankly and systematically,—what it always is implicitly when anything worth saying is being said—the register of their impression on a single personality? Far more to the point than the history of musical form would be the history of a musical man. In that sort of musical history, of course, Bach might come after

Debussy, and quite a different order of truths would tend to be brought out—not objective and fixed and indisputable, I admit, but then only the least important truths are that. If it were done seriously and systematically, as is the standard sort of treatise (seriously, as against the wearisome clouds of gush; systematically, as against the fragmentary personal revelations of genuine critic-craft), we might find gradually that the real values of music are not, after all, so hopelessly incommunicable and incommensurable. Of course, they slip through the fingers in any analysis of the thing in itself, but in the reactions of a human spirit to it fractions of them are caught and fixed; and in such data, if anywhere, they must be studied.

No other art, as far as I know, can show the way to music in this method. Religion can. And, curiously enough, the only penalties that such a method might expect to incur, a narrow circle of interest, namely, and a brief life, have been strikingly reversed for the greater autobiographies of religion. The histories of souls have turned out to have a more general and more enduring contribution to make, even to theology, than the histories of religion and treatises thereon.

Some day one of our music historians will see how much more important it is to be illuminating on music by writing the history of himself, than to be illuminating on himself by writing the history of music. The chief difficulty in the way of a classic *Pilgrim's Progress* in music may be to find one among the great ones able and willing to confess sufficient original sin. We don't want an author who shuddered in the cradle at Gounod, nor one whose pure spirit cannot bear to recall what he said at the knickerbocker age about Bach. Their pilgrimage wouldn't cover enough of the ground.

In the meantime, awaiting the appearance of the classic work, the only value the present little piece of writing can have is that it represents, I believe, something like the potential pilgrimage of every man. My travelling has been,

I can see now, by a well-beaten road, the main highway. Not that I was ever conscious of it at the time. The real pilgrim is always a pioneer, blazing his own trail, even if he goes down Oxford Street. Regarded as an explorer and discoverer, I am of the type of those sea-wanderers, in Mr. Chesterton's parable, who sighted an island, sent a boat ashore, and planted the British ensign—on Brighton beach. Yet when I think of all those who have never started, to whom music means nothing serious; and of all those who have stuck at some point on the road where I too stuck; and when I think of the undreamt-of possessions that are waiting to be possessed, then even I am moved to get up and announce that I have a song to sing—O, and a story that presses to be told, not because it is mine, but because it might be any one's.

For I have this qualification: that in music I am an outsider. 'The way to get inside music', said an authority recently, 'is to compose.' Now I have frequently known myself get as far as the first line of a poem; a child's paint-box or a lump of Plasticene stirs in me some dim daubing or manipulative itch; but hardly even a babyish creative impulse is awakened by the shining key-board, or a pile of fair, ruled manuscript paper. I can't, by any stretch, imagine myself composing a page of music. In the presence of some finished work I am as a mere man before a meringue: he has no earthly notion of how such a mysterious and delightful object came into being.

The attachment between music and myself is one-sided. How much I care for her is hardly worth protesting if it doesn't presently appear; but I do not speak her language as my own. Others follow word by word while I miserably lose the thread, and catch a statement for the first time after its tenth repetition. Others have the entrée, and talk and listen easily, while the outsider, like a dumb animal, can only understand a little by caring a lot.

Yet, for the business in hand, I am far from counting this



a disqualification. Even for insiders there may be a certain interest, in such a case, in observing the lines along which intimacy and appreciation proceed, and in understanding the real musical and psychological significance of it all much better than I do myself. What matters far more, there are those outside, both those altogether outside, and no less the great hosts, amateur and professional, for whom the accent is on performance, who potter about among such small stuff, or, at any rate, such isolated, disconnected scraps, and never get any forrarder in music, and never get a larger, more comprehensive sight of it. For most of them this book carries a 'how much more' argument; few of those likely to read it to the end are not qualified to say: 'How much more do these things belong to me!'—and be possibly the better stimulated to set off and enter into possession of them.

## § 2

My start was as late as it well could be. I didn't discover music till I was grown-up. When you are so late there's not much difference between twenty and sixty. You can never be more than an outsider then. Childhood is the only time in which a language can be learned so that it is native to one; and, if anything, that is truer of Music than of Chinese. It seems to me that the greatest possible results, with the minimum of outlay or effort, are attainable by securing for every child, at the earliest formative age, a few touches of aural training and rhythmic training. More power, and more backing, to all those to-day who see this so clearly and work for it so hard. I can well believe that many a Dalcroze class is a more valuable institution for the future of music than would be a nationally-subsidized Opera House.

It didn't happen to me to come under any musical influences while I was growing up. My parents went on the theory that no child should be made to learn music who did not show

a taste for it. Which sounds reasonable, but you must be sure the child is given a taste *of* it, and it takes a competent person to do that. The observations on which my judgement was formed consisted chiefly of the cases of boys dragged indoors to practise when they might be playing cricket—tragic figures, and all the more tragic if they went willingly.

Besides, by the prevailing code, music was a despicable thing. Do you remember the point of view of Edward in *The Golden Age*? He has been watching his sister and the Vicarage girls setting out on one of their walks, with their heads close together, and ‘chatter, chatter, chatter the whole blessed time’, as he puts it. In a serious mood he is grappling with the problem of what on earth girls talk about. He says, ‘They don’t *know* anything; they can’t *do* anything—except play the piano, and nobody would want to talk about *that*.’ Which gives pretty accurately the attitude of the average boy of the world. It was certainly mine, and I think I kept it up longer than most. I was always adopting and upholding the standards of my society with a religious fervour and loyalty, and always finding myself in the end left high and dry by a mysterious change of values in relation to such matters as girls, or swotting, or dancing, or music. Thus, towards the end of school-days, there were quite decent fellows, two in particular, who would gush shamelessly to one another about the things they played and heard, while I was still stiffening my back against any deliquescent tendencies during anthems or solos in church.

In all those unmusical, or rather anti-musical, days the one piece of music that did make a mark and compel an acknowledgement was the one that seems to have a special power of getting through to the emotions of people who are not ordinarily reached by music at all—the Funeral March from Chopin’s B flat minor Sonata. There are some to whom all music except this is a blank. William Archer somewhere confesses as much, if I remember rightly.

There must be many others for whom it was the beginning of music. Here, for example, is a passage from an autobiographical fragment of Arthur Symons's :

' . . . but another world was opened to me when I was about sixteen. I had been taught scales and exercises on the piano, I had tried to learn music, with very little success, when one day the head master of the school asked me to go into his drawing-room and copy out something for him. As I sat there copying, the music-master, a German, came in and sat down at the piano. He played something which I had never heard before, something which seemed to me the most wonderful thing I had ever heard. I tried to go on copying, but I did not know what I was writing down ; I was caught into an ecstasy, the sound seemed to envelop me like a storm, and then to trickle through me like raindrops shaken from wet leaves, and then to wrap me again in a tempest which was like a tempest of grief. When he had finished, I said, " Will you play that over again ? " As he played it again I began to distinguish it more clearly. . . . He told me it was Chopin's Funeral March. . . . I asked him if he would teach me music and teach me that piece. He promised to teach me that piece, and I learned it. I learned no more scales and exercises ; I learned few more pieces ; but in a little while I could read at sight ; and when I was not reading a book I was reading a piece of music at the piano.'

I remember most sharply two occasions on which I heard the Funeral March. Once from a military band in a vast crowded railway terminus. And once in a church organ-loft, I having been conscripted with another boy to blow, because the regular blower was drunk. We toiled in a rapture—felt as though we were doing it ourselves, and worked the bellows *con gran espressione* ; but also came out and worshipped the organist afterwards. I remember how the *cantabile* section used to seem perfectly destroying and intolerable in its sweetness. It was impossible to believe that there could



be higher heights of expressive song. It is strange—I am pulled up in this first step of my pilgrimage to reflect—how little final are the most certain certainties. Strange to be once again back there, and to realize from the standpoint of :



how flat and formal would have seemed this :



And then, lifted out of the past by the mere thought of the spaciousness and gloriousness of that last tune (which comes, of course, from the heart of the *Eroica* Funeral March), to look down and see the poor little sentimental triviality so far below.

Apart from this one thing there is a very minimum of musical impressions to record. Some of the *Lieder ohne Worte*, which a younger sister played at home, pleased me, and I had been known to ask for them by number.

### § 3

The Chopin exception, however, turned out to be rather a prophetic one. That name, before long, was to bulk large. University days began. I found myself with a pianist and a violinist for my most intimate friends. Quite suddenly, in a few weeks, I began to listen a little to music. That may

not seem such a very extraordinary thing to do, but how many there are, even of fairly regular concert-goers, who have never dreamt of doing it—of listening, I naturally mean, as they listen to what is said by their neighbour's whisper. How easily it might never have occurred to me to try to do it. But so often I was sole audience, and my friends, with the touching eagerness of amateur musicians, must collect even my impressions.

Every amateur violinist plays, or used to play once on a time, an arrangement of Chopin's E flat Nocturne. My friend was no exception. I shall never think unkindly of that *morceau*, because it was epoch-making for me. The Funeral March had stood apart, seeming to owe its effect to special associations. The Nocturne was followed up; there might conceivably be more of this sort of thing. Arrangements of other nocturnes were procured. *There wasn't a dud among them.* We shan't inquire at the moment into the other things that were duds. An absolutely clear-cut line appeared. There was the rest of music, which might be pleasant, which might be very pleasant; and there was Chopin, which was serious. I bought a violin. I took lessons. They were not very orthodox. At the end of three weeks I was playing nocturnes. And in the course of the next three years I amassed a monumentally complete and monumentally fatuous collection—of all the Chopin arrangements for violin and piano that had ever been published.

Meantime Chopin was flowing in by other avenues. One after another the most universally played works came within my horizon: the A flat Ballade, the B flat minor Scherzo, the G minor Ballade, the A flat Polonaise, the D flat and A flat Preludes (15 and 17), the Opus 35 Sonata, the F sharp Impromptu; these are some whose successive impact in the early days I can vividly remember. The course of events was the same in each case: a first hearing that conveyed nothing; one or two more that gradually planted singing

fragments in one's head; and then the occasion when the work left one speechless, or stammering, with delight and excitement. One learned to know what would happen; there was not one which failed; the line round Chopin became more and more exclusive rather than less.

It is not easy really to convey, or even oneself to believe in, the almost intoxicated state of mind of the Chopin period. The best way of obtaining a record like this would be to keep a musical diary, and have it stolen and published by some one else, without emendations or deletions. As it happens, I have come across a contemporary document. Internal evidence places it about the year 3 (dating from the E flat Nocturne, as from the founding of Rome). I am sorry to say I have not the strength of mind to give it intact, even with apologies for its youthfulness. I'm bound to confess that the worst passages, which I suppress, would have been the best evidentially; but I'm not scientifically detached enough to be shameless, and, on the other hand, I'm certainly not prepared to quote it just *pour rire*.

'I would give up', the opening statement runs, 'all the poetry and all the pictures in the world for the music; and all the rest of the music for the Chopin; and all the rest of the Chopin for' (the piece of the moment happens to be) 'the *Berceuse*.' Knowing it, 'I wake up in the mornings happy without remembering why, like some one in love.'

Presently comes the inevitable 'programme', rather exceptionally good this time, however. I had lit, in Ibsen, on the words of Brand to his wife: '*Go and watch him while he sleeps. Sing him into bright dreams. A child's soul is as clear and placid as a tarn in the summer sunshine. A mother can hover over it like a bird, which, on its silent flight, mirrors her beauty in its deepest depths.*' One could well believe the *Berceuse* built on this beautiful simile, or the simile on the *Berceuse*—the ecstatic hovering of the melody over the low, unchanging bass, the tranquil brooding. . . . They speak alike.



Certainly it is a lovely projection in words for Chopin's lovely idea of a cradle reverie. Then follows a description of the music, from which I take only the conclusion: 'At last the tranquil reverie is all gathered up in a climax of tenderness. There come two bars in which the happy dream seems to remember that it is not only a dream; it comes back from its soaring among beautiful far-away things to the still more beautiful reality. How can I suggest the rapturous tenderness of those two bars? When I was a little boy I used to spend the summer in an old farmhouse. Swallows nested at the corner of my bedroom window. Sometimes, after I had been a great while in bed, and was still awake, although it was quite dark, there would be a stirring in the nest, and then—the heavenliest thing!—a low twitter; a sweet little gurgle of contentment. There was home and love and motherhood in it, and the delicious shiver of snuggling down. It would create such a rush of feeling as nearly burst my small soul. . . .

'Soon comes oblivion. Before the end the shimmering veil is cast off and there is one last sight of the naked melody, softened now with weariness. It sinks back, and quietly lies down in the place whence it arose.'

This reveals, I fancy, a trick of brooding over isolated phrases that stuck in one's memory between the not very frequent hearings that there would be of the *Berceuse*. Otherwise it is difficult to see how so much significance was read into the 'two bars' (which are those from the point marked *Sostenuto*). It is just the point where, in most renderings, one would have the impression of touching solid, matter-of-fact ground again. On the other hand, the musical direction may have been inserted precisely to guard against the firming-up of the music being given a matter-of-fact colour, and the kind of interpretation suggested would be at worst something more than ample to keep a pianist on the right lines.

However, that is a matter of no importance. It is to get first-hand evidence of the Chopin period that I have repro-



duced these fragments. The sort of response to his music that they reveal will seem to have a good deal of adolescent extravagance in it, and, except from those in the same state, will possibly come under suspicion of owing everything to auto-suggestion. I don't think that is the case. At any rate there was the substantial fact of a passionate, almost physical, thirst, which only Chopin's music could meet.

My sharpest sense of this had come when I spent six months in the west of Canada, and, even among so many new interests and outlets and activities, gradually became aware of a lack that I had never felt before—a famine of music. One morning, in a remote ramshackle hotel, I heard outside my bedroom window a small clear whistling, in dead-true time and intonation. The strange aubade included, of all things in the world, a Chopin Nocturne (the familiar G minor of Opus 37). The whistler was a man painting the house, an Englishman, rather bleary, hopelessly uninteresting. He played the piano; unfortunately there was no piano available. But what a thirst he had given me! With that thirst still on me I came home. I could no more get it satiated. For hours I would pore over the scores of Chopin's music, familiar and unfamiliar. Heaven knows what I made out from them; it's little enough I can appreciate through the eye even now. But the practice served me well on occasions.

If I had been wise, I should have tackled the piano, late as it was, but it seemed too hopeless; a thirsty man is the last man to dig a well; he doesn't think of the years to come. I lived on musical friends. I even plagued concert artists anonymously to give me what I wanted. I recollect a success with one of the more famous; and the two other members of my *claque* will recollect how I worked them, after the Chopin group, till we ensured the *encore*, and the pianist played the desired work, not without a preliminary speculative glance round the hall for his unknown correspondent.

Yet all these sources together—concerts, friends (in whom

I ought to say I had become exceptionally fortunate) and my own fiddling—gave me but dribblets. I wanted a proper drink. There was one hope that began to take outline: a player-piano. I stayed in houses where they kept the wonderful creature, and I recognized immediately that it was the first of all essentials, and that, if I had to live in a barn, with no other furnishing, the barn should have in its driest corner a player. Was not every note of Chopin that had ever been published, including the whole 51 Mazurkas, including the songs, including every fragment that had been retrieved posthumously—was it not all cut on rolls, and waiting there in boxes, like canned meat—if one only had a tin-opener?

The first big taste came when I hired a cabinet-player for a month, with unlimited access to a music-roll library. All through the hot August of the Coronation year, with the rest of my people at the seaside, I played Chopin from morning to night in my shirt-sleeves, and, I'm afraid, missed the procession. No scenery and no wild adventures could have given me such a gorgeous and exciting holiday. When, at a tremendous climactic moment, I drove myself, stool and all, over backwards, and leapt to my feet to get into position again, I pitied from my heart the dull life of a cannibal chief or a big-game hunter.

Very soon afterwards, in Liverpool, a player-piano became a permanent fixture—as far as the quarterly instalment plan allows of the attribute of finality. Then, with an eagerness which only towards the end slightly abated, I proceeded to make acquaintance with the whole of Chopin's music. The player-piano, like the aeroplane, makes possible these wide views of music which are utterly out of reach of the ordinary pianist, and only otherwise attainable through the ability to read scores like books. Every spare shilling in those days went to the laying-down of a Chopin stratum of music-rolls. It lies now beneath many super-imposed rows. What a history can be read in those successive layers, as in the geology of

a cliff-face, and how unnecessarily thick some of the Eocene deposits now appear !

#### § 4

Before I come to the final resultant in which this long period of Chopin-worship worked out, let us try to get inward to the reasons for it and the nature of it. It is an effort that is well worth making, because such a passion is, I think, one of the most important phenomena that come within the scope of those who would understand and raise the musical culture of our time. What I have described as my own case is a very common case, perhaps usually in a less extreme form, but far more common than, I imagine, most experts realize. In the South-Coast town where I write this I have sometimes gone down a certain street in the visitor season, and heard from half a dozen different windows Preludes or Studies or Nocturnes issuing. I have mentioned the significant fact that Chopin's music has been cut complete by the Roll companies—he being the only composer, I believe, so distinguished. Let any one go to the annual Music Roll Sale at the Aeolian Hall and keep his eyes open in the throng of buyers. He will soon identify the sort of treasure that three out of five are hunting down in the classical shelves.

In any thought of the musical culture that is going on to-day, especially that in which the player-piano is taking a part, it is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of Chopin. We have to reckon with Chopin, first as the great awakener, and then as the great detainer. He is arresting in both senses of the word, he arrests attention and he arrests progress. Mr. Wells makes a character try to express this distinction between two women—that the first had blotted out for him all other women, while the second had seemed to gather up and represent womanhood. The Chopin passion resembles the former of these cases. His art puts a living significance into music for people who would never otherwise



have found it there; but in the process it eclipses, for such people, the rest of music, rather than illuminates it.

Suppose you were trying to awaken the attention of a musically deaf person, what fragment of serious music would you resort to most hopefully? I suggest the second subject of the G major Nocturne:



There is a pretty story of small children stopping in their play to listen to the opening of the F major Ballade. I hope it was that; one would like to believe it was that.

It is not hard to understand why Chopin should be thus the great awakener. His whole endowment—his passion for beauty, his sense of the dramatic, his gifts of melody and musical invention; his technical methods, his temperamental instincts—all his equipment naturally converges, or was deliberately brought to bear, on the single point of making immediate, telling effect.

(1) The inspirational pressure behind his music is at a steady



maximum that gets the last ounce of effect, without overdriving and tending to burst the machinery. His ideas are just not big enough to jam in the rush for expression.

(2) The technical structure of his music is directed to immediate effect. He does not seek that high organic unity in which every detail, when we peer into it, is seen to be derived, and the whole, when we stand back and view it, is something more than the sum of its parts. All the infinite pains that might be spent in so organizing his composition Chopin spends instead in selecting, shaping, polishing each fragment as an end in itself; so that, moment by moment, the outsider is likely to find more beauty and significance in Chopin than in Beethoven. Nor is the effect of the whole entirely sacrificed. It often has at least the quality of narrative—narrative of incident and adventure, in which anything might happen except a dull page, as against the self-determined and inevitable course of a narrative of character. To many a beginner, indeed, it has the quality of narrative as against the quality of preaching; the Nocturne or Ballade is like a splendid short story; the typical sonata movement more like a sermon, with much expatiation on heads and subheads of the text.

Arising out of this, we have to note the perfect lucidity of Chopin. You always know what he's after. Every note has some meaning, and a quite obvious one. Everything that could possibly heighten the beauty or the dramatic effect is included; everything else is cut away. The more intellectual structure must use notes as pawns in the great scheme, and often they seem to come very cheap. Chopin never uses a note which he hasn't loved and blessed; and all his labour upon his material is to the end of making it more perfectly transparent.

(3) The emotional content is of the kind that scores the most immediate effect. Love-songs, war-songs, sorrow-songs make their passionate direct appeal. Feverish agitation com-

municates itself to the most insensitive. There is no reserve or restraint, to risk being mistaken for coldness. An adopted background of tragedy, of Byronic gloom, creates the setting in which even slight thoughts and feelings claim to have a momentous importance. Sentiment is sharpened to its most poignant, with a craving to probe sensibility, a finding of intolerable sweetness in intolerable pain. So that this description is possible: 'Chopin's music screams under its breath, like a patient they are operating upon in the hospital. There are flowers on the pillow, great sickly pungent flowers, and he draws in their perfume with the same breath that is jarred down below by the scraping sound of the little saw.'<sup>1</sup> Such highly seasoned dishes are naturally those that are savoured most easily in an unfamiliar art.

All these factors, put in control of the almost unparalleled sheer physical pleasure of his music, combine to make Chopin easily the great awakener.

As I see it now, music meant for me a thrill, and it is Chopin who, one feels, was full of thrills as he wrote, and who has got them into his pages so that even the shallowest sympathy must be aware of some of them. I don't, of course, mean only sound and fury; the thrill can be a quiet one. Nor do I mean merely effects that could be characterized as morbid and neurotic. There is a school-girl in Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea* who has a thirst for what she describes as 'thrilling', and satisfies it by making a youth, whom she knows to be dying of phthisis, talk of his future and the things he is going to do. No doubt there is plenty of food for that phase of green-sickness in Chopin, but there are also innumerable things that couldn't possibly be brought under the charge—a purer poetry; white music as well as purple; fresh, out-of-doors things as well as the hot breath of the conservatory. What I mean by the word covers these things also. I mean by a thrill what one feels to be *spiritually dramatic*. Chopin's

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Symons, *Spiritual Adventures*, 'Christian Trevalga'.

music thrills because he is always seeking to exploit to the last vibration the possibilities of an idea or a situation ; he is straining at each moment after the most dramatic possible presentation.

Beethoven can be very irritating and disappointing ; he seems to miss chances. There are great tunes that seem to ask for some big, massive, climactic statement, *grand jeu*, and never get it. There are lovely strains that have come and gone in a breath, and are not even deigned repetition. Also Beethoven can be boring, he can let down the tension for long stretches, or never screw it up very high. Chopin cannot bear to be boring ; however large the canvas, he must work up every square inch of it, exploit to the uttermost farthing, at each and every moment, the musical and emotional values.

It may seem an uncouth comparison, but in one way Chopin is like Kipling. Kipling is a super-journalist ; he has a unique gift for distilling that mysterious essence, 'copy', out of every human activity or emotion : he can suggest to us that there's something quite indescribably tremendous about a man's marksmanship, or his Englishness, or his knowledge of statistics, or his religion, and we temporarily accept the suggestion for the sake of some vague thrill it gives us, and because it would seem to be almost impious to question it. He, too, is always playing for the moment, trying to make each page as significant as possible.

Chopin is the poet-journalist of music. He extracts all the copy from human moods to make hot, passionate drama, or cool, fresh, charming lyrics. He wins his thrill out of a love tragedy or out of a cradle reverie, out of a nation's *débâcle* or out of the little wry song of a yellow-hammer, all alone on the topmost bough while the day goes down.

Therefore, just as there was a time in my school-days when, with all the will in the world, I couldn't see that any one had written, was writing, or could write better stuff than Kipling, so there was this long time when Chopin seemed to



me far and away beyond every other composer because he had gone to the limits of expressiveness, got the last thrill out of each moment.

I hope the terms used in this characterization won't seem to question artistic sincerity. If Chopin is the type of singer that 'leans his breast up-till a thorn', at least there is no thrill in his music that has not made his own nerves tingle. A story is told, I think of the crescendo octave passage in the A flat Polonaise, that Chopin, playing it alone, was so overcome by the feelings it evoked that he fled in terror from the room. If the anecdote bears the typical marks of the class to which it all too probably belongs, it is an invention at any rate true to character.

### § 5

Now obviously there is another side to all this. It is a bit of sheer good luck for the musical pilgrim that he should enter at once into a region of such vivid beauties and excitements; but how is he ever going to tear himself away from it? He turns a dreary eye on those who speak of loftier heights and more sublime beauty; he lends an unbelieving ear when they insist on illustration. He has tried, and thinks he knows. Other music will either have a touch of the Chopin quality; in which case, good, but why not the pure fountain itself? Or it will be different from Chopin, and every respect in which it differs will be a falling short of the most satisfying and most thrilling possible appeal. Chopin on his own ground cannot be surpassed, and before one can reach another standing-place one must travel by a road that seems dull and unpromising from the existing view-point. It would even be appalling to think, if it were not totally incredible, that one could possibly come to prefer the close, industrious development of some short first subject in a sonata movement, or the busy maze of a fugue, or any sort of equable, centrally-heated music to the fire and ice of Chopin.



So we have to reckon with Chopin as the great detainer. After a certain point he does not open up the pilgrim's path, but rather stands across it. In such a case I do not think there is any way round. There is something futile about attempts to foster or force 'appreciation' away from the line of its own strongest inclination. The huntsman whips his hounds off the line they want to hunt, with a superior knowledge of where he can show them sport. But it is dangerous, even with superior knowledge, so to treat the musical scent. Because one great asset we have in hand to start with. The Chopin passion, however limited, is genuine. And that is too rare and precious a quality to be lightly risked. Think of men and women, all whose reverence for art has been second-hand, to whom beauty of word or colour or sound has never brought real emotion or exhilaration, who have yet come to discover a music for which they positively grow hungry, and which is satisfying like things to eat. So far from the feigned interest that is a duty of politeness, their feeling when some hand touches out a few premonitory phrases is nearer to the frank gusto of low life, or nursery life, that greets the approaching dish with a brisk aeration of the saliva. In all the atmosphere of make-believe and perfunctory worship in which music, even more than the other arts, has to live, here is, at any rate, genuineness. The pilgrim must not be dragged on, supposing any force or authority could do it, at the risk of leaving his heart behind. Let him stick to his country till it begins to be too small for him, and refuse to leave it except for a better country, which he himself seeks.

Chopin must be worked through. The cure for Chopin-fever is Chopin *ad lib*. All those special qualities which make this music unique will in the end reveal their limitations.

The simple technical structure itself trains the perception to look beyond it to larger and more highly-organized forms. The boy who has revelled in Kipling comes presently to Hardy and Tolstoi, and novels and dramas in whose inevitable

course he is forced to acknowledge a higher seriousness and a mightier grip. They offer a less vivid enjoyment, and the transition may be long delayed, but there is no going back ; after *Anna Karenina*, *The Light that Failed* will never be the same again.

The emotional content burns itself out. In my experience this was happening all the time to individual works. The same music might renew its thrills a hundred times, but not a thousand times. By the time a new work was in full eruption an old one had become a region of extinct fires ; the same lava streams were there, fixed in the shape of their pouring incandescence, but now cold and frozen. Here is a very wise criticism of the whole emotional appeal of Chopin : ' Like all other young men he was absorbed, entranced, with the *works*. Their power over young people is remarkable, but not more remarkable than the fact that they almost invariably lose this power over the individual, while they have as yet retained it over the race ; for of all the multitude who do homage at the shrine . . . few linger long, and fewer still, after the turmoil of life has yielded room for thought, renew their homage. Most of those who make the attempt are surprised—some of them troubled—at the discovery that the shrine can work miracles no more. The Chopin-fever . . . has its origin, perhaps, in the fact that the *composer* makes no demand either on the intellect or the conscience, but confines himself to friendly intercourse with those passions whose birth long precedes that of choice in their objects—whence a wealth of emotion is squandered. It is long before we discover that far richer feeling is the result of a regard bent on the profound and the pure'.<sup>1</sup> I have to confess that the first word italicized should be 'poems', and the second 'poet', and that another name should stand in the place of 'Chopin'. The passage is, in fact, a criticism of the Byron-cult of an older generation ; but it is out of date for that purpose, and it is so extraordinarily

<sup>1</sup> George MacDonald.

true of the emotional side of Chopin's appeal, that I have ventured to readdress it.

Finally, the very lucidity of Chopin has this reverse side—that one exhausts the possibilities of his music. It is so direct and clear in its appeal, the intention can be so completely grasped, that, one might say, you come to see all round it. Gissing says of certain passages in *The Tempest*: ' . . . their virtue can never be so entirely savoured as to leave no pungency of gusto for the next approach.' That is exactly what one cannot say of Chopin's music; it can be savoured to the last note. So it makes its immediate effect; and having made its effect, has no more to yield.

For me there is an exception—the F minor Ballade. Of all his larger works that seems to me the only one that partly evades comprehension. One feels that it partly escapes the composer, as it partly escapes the listener; instead of his mastering it, sometimes it masters him. I never knew how much I cared for it until once, after a long absence from practically all music, I got back to my player. It struck me as interesting to note which roll, out of all the stacks of old favourite things, I should play first. My hand drew out at length this Ballade, and ever since it has stood for me a little above all the rest of Chopin. I was under the impression that the judgement was heretical, but Dr. Ernest Walker writes to me: 'The F minor Ballade is undoubtedly the crown of Chopin's work.' I am glad to think that a sheer process of natural selection, operating over a number of years, should leave an outsider like myself with that same ultimate residue which so discerning a judgement also singles out.

Dr. Walker would also lift out of the ruck the Prelude Opus 45, the Barcarolle, and the Fantaisie. I agree about the beautiful Brahmsian Prelude; and about the Barcarolle, which certainly continues to grow on one long after the mere notes of it have become familiar; I believe Tausig would never play it before more than two people. The



Fantaisie does not seem to me to have distinctiveness in kind; it only stands out as the typical Chopin at his very best.

Dr. Walker adds incidentally: 'Like Mozart and Schubert—and, among older but still not old men, Beethoven himself—Chopin seems to have been going up the ladder hand over hand in his last years: Mendelssohn is perhaps the only example of a great composer who was at his greatest in quite early youth and declined afterwards.' Which starts the reflexion that Chopin, had he lived long enough, might have had, like Beethoven, a late period, when we should have seen him transcending the language and ideas that had served him so well and which he had mastered so perfectly, and breaking out into a dimmer, more uncertain, but far larger world. I think there is a most fascinating and important study waiting to be done by some capable person on the psychology of growth exhibited in various composers. I believe some generalizations might be reached, particularly in relation to what we might call a 'swan-song phase'. Much that has passed for evidence of weakening powers may be due rather to a late enlargement of vision, to a man's getting 'far ben' in music, and beginning to have glimmering doubts about the reality and finality of his work, accompanied by a sort of weariness of the methods and idioms that have grown so slick to his hand in a lifetime's usage.



# PART TWO

## § 1

THE first enlargement from a more or less closed world of Chopin was into Wagner, and it came suddenly from a hearing of *Tristan und Isolde* in Liverpool. Until then Wagner had only been accessible in occasional and sadly unimpressive productions of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. Even so, I have to convict myself, as often in this retrospective record, of the most amazing imperviousness. One is forced to realize over and over again how little capable the untrained mind is of receiving a simple impression and making a natural judgement, how heavy an inertia has to be overcome, how easily some ridiculousness in the setting or faultiness of rendering can shut the doors against, for example, even the music of *Lohengrin*. It is a great fallacy to argue that an artless judgement will be, within its limits, authentic and real. On the contrary, all sorts of accidental circumstances influence it which the more sophisticated hearer is able to sift out. Instead of a simple receptiveness towards a new thing, the door is either barricaded or perhaps flung unnecessarily wide, and decorated with an arch of welcome.

The doors, anyhow, would have gone down before the glorious performance of *Tristan* that happened; but they were partly open already. I went with some preliminary pianola acquaintance with parts of the music, and the impact of the great work of art was quite overwhelming. For some days thereafter the ordinary wheels of life hardly seemed to be running on solid ground.

It was an experience in which drama took on an undreamt-of potency—an experience of drama realizing, perhaps, some of its original function. For the work, so much more than a spectacle, seemed to suck into its course the banked watchers and listeners, as a river drains the valley slope. It was *like* a river, from the first drops that a dark little hill-spring pulses over its brim, so infinitesimally, so fatefully, to flow and flow, softly, swiftly, madly, drearily, darkly, 'through caverns measureless to man', on to the exultant thunder of its full flood's leap to death in a sunless sea. Surely *Tristan* comes wonderfully near justifying even Wagner's grandiose theories of and claims for 'the art-work of the future', and must stand high up among the mighty things of all time that have moved or shall move the human spirit.

I have heard *Tristan* often since then, but never again in quite the same way, and I don't know that I want to. I have an idea that it doesn't come off for any one more than once; and that occasion doesn't wait till familiarity has made the music continuously interesting and appealing from beginning to end, but occurs when there are still long stretches of it unappreciated, which enter only subconsciously into one's impression, while the dramatic action carries one over. By the time these lacunae have filled in a little, one finds oneself listening at the great moments with the ears of long ago. One regards from the bank now, certainly with admiration, with awe; but only in remembrance is one borne on the breast of that current, and tossed in that conflux of waters.

This is only to say that the greatest experiences in art cannot be repeated, any more than life can be re-lived. It is not to imply that the music itself fades and wears thin. There are still those moments in the love-music of the second act when one has the conviction, as strong as ever, that no power on earth could hold up the flow of music and stop it dead—not a bomb through the roof, not a paralytic seizure of the conductor; not though the whole material framework

of the universe dissolved and left not a wrack behind. So strongly does the vital current of song set, that somehow, somewhere, it must press on.

There is still, as it seems to me, that revelation from near the tragic heart of all Wagner's music in the Prelude and opening of Act III—that heaviness that has yet within it the hot spark of life, stifling and impotent. And then, in such a created atmosphere, the extraordinary art of the shepherd's tune—a Shakespearean conception!

There is still that deliberate gathering-up, the final full-grown culmination, the terrific ultimate assertion of that with which the music began; and always one has forgotten how mighty it is.

Most of all, though I come to it last, there is still the unforgettable thrill of the opening—that first whisper, out of the dark, that freezes one to one's seat :

*Lento e languido.*

*pp*

*p*

&c.

It is at the moment of opening that the composer has his chance, whatever he can make of it. It is then he is most a creator. There is silence, and, as God said, Let there be light, he says, Let there be sound. The conductor gathers his forces; the pianist holds his hands for a moment; there is stillness, wonder, expectancy; the ear of the listener is at its most sensitive, his mind a white sheet of paper. At that moment there is something of the miracle of birth, if it is only a little cool fugue subject that writes itself in single notes. Never will soft, 'six-four' chord sound so touching, nor harsh chord so devastating; how the abrupt announcement of the



'C minor' brings one's heart into one's mouth! But, in all music, has that opportunity of the opening ever been so perfectly seized and filled full as by the first restless, yearning phrases of *Tristan*? They are like the slow waking of some mortal on a strange planet—and strange enough world in truth it is, this elemental realm of love and death, for Mr. Smith and Miss Brown (who are having an evening at the theatre) and all the rest of us, in pit and stalls and gallery; and yet, strangest of all, a world which is theirs too, and ours.

## § 2

The dawning might of Wagner brought indeed a twilight of the old gods.

So—werf' ich den Brand  
In Walhalla's prangende Burg,

—and Brynhilde's torch lit on the supremacy of Chopin, anyhow. First his bigness was dwarfed. It could not possibly be otherwise among the vast new architecture of cloud-capped towers, gorgeous palaces and solemn temples. His vividness was dimmed among these burnished colours. His heroics were no longer world-quelling; his tales of passion were the moods of a boy beside these conceptions of a superhuman energy of aim and desire.

Chopin might afford to lose bigness; so much of his best is precious in its littleness. A single thread of bird-song can maintain itself among the wide glories of mountains and clouds; a single eagle-feather (to take Schumann's simile for some of the Preludes) is no less authentic than a battle-cruiser. Wagner's music might correspond in art to that Hebrew type in religion which sought its God in the power that ruled Behemoth and created the cedars of Lebanon; and Chopin's art be the nearer to that finer insight which found God in the power that cared for the sparrow and clothed the flower of the field. Nothing in Wagner can overwhelm, or even



challenge, the E major Étude, or the twenty-third Prelude, or half a dozen more.

Yet even here an invisible sapping of foundations was at work. Even such exquisite things were hardly safe against the suspicion that their *milieu* was the drawing-room, that their art was of the order of a pretty picture or a 'happy thought'. That is putting it far too strongly, and cheapening more than is fair or true what are among the treasures of music; but it may serve to indicate the line along which one's feeling about them could be modified, not because of anything that surpassed them in kind, but because the whole field of music was insensibly enlarged. The walls of the *salon* melted away, and one found oneself in a place that seemed more commensurate with the wide world of reality. Music was entering upon the second stage of its conquest, and taking under its sway large new areas of thought and life that one had never known it could touch.

Let me try to suggest some of the factors in Wagner's art that contributed to this effect.

(1) No doubt the orchestra counted for something, as against a music that was perfectly at home on the piano. Yet the average musician would probably over-estimate this. He is apt to forget that there is another side—that the outsider may sometimes even require his music to be reduced to a pianoforte transcription before he can grasp and weigh the actual substance of it.

(2) One was continually caught and held by a quality of strangeness in Wagner's phrases which gave his art the wild naturalness of life. Let the opening of *Tristan*, of which I have already spoken, stand as the best possible example. No mere unconventionality of technique could produce that quality, though unconventionality of technique might follow from it. It is born of the sense of wonder, and is creative of wonder. It enters into possession of the world of romance, and at the same time safeguards its possessor from separating

romance from life and reducing it to a set of facile formulae and idealizations like Royal Academy story-pictures. The framework of the music-dramas, and their lines of action, might be stereotyped, but they were filled in with a music and with a thought which breathed at once mystery and realism. The arresting note of strangeness again and again brought one face to face with a vision of life.

(3) We come to the main point : that Wagner sought for music a far larger function than Chopin had exercised. One had to do with music which addressed itself to a greater part of one's consciousness than had been accustomed to respond to music. Even in the realm of feeling its function was wider—apart from the question of whether or not it was more intense. This music came out of a bigger heart—out of the heart of a prophet as well as of a poet. Wagner's music is outward-regarding ; Chopin's is inward-regarding.

But further, it addressed itself to more than to the feelings—to the mind. Naturally, you might say, since it was associated with action and with explicit thought. I think it would still make some such claim if it were wordless. In analysing old impressions it is not possible, of course, to make that separation. But one can go as far as this—that one had a sense of continuity in the music, in those days, at any rate. It was impossible to hear single works or excerpts without thinking of the rest ; each was like one loop of the long cable dragged up to the light. Even with a closer familiarity the sense does not altogether disappear that Wagner's music hangs together more than that of almost any other composer ; and the impression does not seem to come from mere mannerism or idiom, or the occasional resemblances and cross-quotations, but from some inherent continuity. It holds through the whole range of colour and expression. It is not broken even in those swift plunges in which Wagner delights, from hot voluptuous air into the cool purity of the forest or the spring-time fields. So you may see in a decorator's samples some

particular kind of paint—say, a lustrous paint—displayed in the whole gamut of colour, and retaining its peculiarity throughout.

This continuity gives to the music the character of a presentment of life. The world is being steadily viewed by a constant personality. If, then, we include in our survey the thought with which the music is bound up, and which is plainly before us in words, we realize that the continuity rests upon an intellectual basis; that we have to do not only with a presentation of life, but with a serious interpretation of it—a philosophy, a religion.

Wagner's music makes a wider claim on the human spirit not only because, as it comes to us, it is allied with other modes of expression and explication, but because behind it, at its source, more of the whole man enters into the inspiration and shaping of it than is in motion in the composer of 'pure' music. For good or for evil the energy of an intelligent, purposeful reaction, seeking to interpret life and even to change life, has moulded it. The same thing might be true of very poor and dull didactic music. It can be urged that the beauty and strength of Wagner's music do not depend on such a consideration, but rather exist in spite of it. Yet, granted that the music does make its mark by its own beauty and strength, the intelligence and will that are associated with it certainly enter into its importance. It is no use the purist protesting; you can't, in practice, isolate the musical values; what he would call irrelevant considerations were involved in the birth of the music, and can't be entirely separated out in the listener's impression and response. The dilettante who comes under the sway of Wagner discovers that music is overflowing the place assigned to it in his scheme of things, is interpenetrating, influencing, or at least addressing itself to, his whole thought and outlook. Music is assuming a larger function.

So much may be said of the Wagner stage as we stand there and look backward from it. Turning now to look ahead



something more must presently be said on one or two of these points.

### § 3

If Wagner's world seemed to dwarf Chopin's the very nature of its largeness brings one all the more quickly to question in turn its finality.

One line of development that implies a criticism of Wagner is represented by Debussy. In Debussy we find again that strangeness, the note of wonder, which creates the atmosphere at once of mystery and realism. As to intellectualism, we are puzzled at first to say whether we have advanced in it or away from it. We have done both. Intellectualism has evolved to a point when it strives to obliterate itself. Suppression, indeed, of more than intellectualism is a conscious policy of this music. The same turn of the tide which left eloquence and earnestness high and dry in this country, and taught our modern *intelligentsia* to prefer an off-hand and casual utterance for its most sacred articles of belief, produced a school of art:

De la musique avant toute chose,  
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair  
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,  
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou pose.

That formula, which Verlaine gave to so many poets and artists of a modern yesterday, we find Debussy working out in music. To define is to delimit; to commit oneself to a statement is to be open to confutation; to be dramatic is to be haunted by the dreadful doubt that one is melodramatic; to allow oneself to grow excited is to forget the cool, unsympathetic superior eye which finds one vulgar. Whereas to be vague sets no limit to the possible range of expression; to avoid weightiness is to be safe from being weighed and found wanting; to be dispassionate is to throw upon the listener the responsibility of such thrills as he may feel.



It is music which claims to be absolutely free. But freedom can only be realized unto some end. If the wanderer can only preserve the illusion of freedom by refusing to go under any roof lest he should become seizable, lest his art should be committed to that *qui pèse ou pose*, then the wilderness is his prison; emancipation is really a sort of claustrophobia. Debussy's freedom is not without the element of such a fear, and the sense of extreme mobility may suddenly turn to the sense of extreme restraint. The music then seems full of suppressions because it is in fear of the obvious, because its feeling is self-conscious its intelligence self-critical; because, paradoxically enough, of its boundless ambition—it will close its arms on nothing, but rather keep them open lest it appear to grasp less than infinity.

One interesting discovery, however, emerges: suppression finds a new way of securing dramatic intensity. Chopin once, on a celebrated occasion, when he was too weak with illness to play an outstanding passage in adequate *fortissimo*, chose, as alternative, to play it *pianissimo*, with immense effectiveness. Debussy sometimes exploits the significance of restraint by the same simple law of reversal; intensity is suggested by giving the least possible indication of it.

Take the description in *Jean Christophe* of a first impression of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a description that represents well enough, I suppose, the normal experience:

After the first act:

“Est-ce que c'est, tout le temps, comme cela?”

“Oui.”

“Mais il n'y a rien.”

Kohn exclaimed and called him a philistine.

“Nothing at all,” continued Christophe. “No music. No development. It has no consecutiveness. It has no being. Some very fine harmonies. Some nice little orchestral effects in excellent taste. But it is nothing, nothing at all . . .”

‘He set himself to listen again. Gradually the lamp shone

out; he began to see something in the twilight . . . The French musician seemed to have striven, with ironical discretion, to make all these passionate sentiments murmur quietly. Love, death—without cries. It was only by an imperceptible trembling in the melodic line, *a quiver in the orchestra like a tightening of one's lips*, that one was aware of the drama that was passing in these souls.'

The revelation of such an effectiveness comes like a rebuke to violence of action and passionate declamation and the titanic travail of the orchestra to pile Pelion on Ossa. By its very restraint it stimulates, in a susceptible mood, a sort of hypertrophy of the imagination, like those nightmarish vigils of our childhood, when a minute whisper of sound seemed to swell out into the roar of many waters; or the pressure of one finger resting on another to become the annihilating total of all the weight in the universe.

Here we have the capture of a new range of expression for music. Wagner himself, transcending his own methods, might have come to it. It might even be argued that there are examples of it in Wagner; there certainly are many cases of thematic allusions, subtle, almost hidden, whose effect is to intensify enormously the dramatic situation of the moment, or to throw quite a new light upon it. From its very nature, however, the device of what we might call the least possible suggestion cannot be set in operation without a complete renunciation of the opposite method. Debussy made such a renunciation. But the problem arises, how much did it cost him? One echoes the query of the cynic, 'si cet idéal de sacrifice ne venait pas de ce que l'on sacrifiait ce que l'on ne possédait pas?' For Wagner, to have checked the torrent of energy that rushed into the second act of *Tristan* or the conclusion of the *Götterdämmerung* would have been an appalling sacrifice. It might have been justified. Such a power suppressed might have given us a still more stupendous conception. Wagner might have said in effect:

In tragic hints here see what evermore  
 Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,  
 Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,  
 To throw that faint thin line upon the shore,<sup>1</sup>

and given us in his music only the 'faint thin line'. But the appalling thing for most composers would be the attempt to supply anything more than tragic hints. The great renunciation of vital lyricism and passionate eloquence is considerably more likely to represent impotence that resigns the task, rather than super-strength that will not stoop to it. The rebuke to Wagnerian uproar and emotionalism is hardly valid until it comes from one who is in a position to sacrifice what Wagner possessed, and chooses to do so.

This all sounds rather hostile, and barren of acknowledgement to Debussy. It is the fault of pressing too summarily to a conclusion along the side-line we are following at present. Realizing the unfairness and rank ingratitude, I must put in a few words at least for all the delight and vision of beauty one has found in Debussy, failing which, indeed, his name would not have mattered enough to me to come into this narrative.

There is that ten minutes of dream-stuff, the most delicious dish in modern orchestral fare—I should think that even the world-weary professional critic is seldom safer from a sigh of boredom or a groan of satiety than when the flute breathes:



Through all the delicate, lovely music-stuff that ensues one's cup is full; and then the moment comes, towards the end, that

<sup>1</sup> Meredith—last lines of *Modern Love*.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*.



makes mine run over with deliciousness, just as one remembers it used to do, long ago in happy fields, under one of those rare effects of self-consciousness, when one caught oneself being happy, and sighed because it was all so wonderfully good. Faithfully the music expresses it for me, at exactly the right moment, 'in a voice sad with the whole of pleasure'.<sup>1</sup>

If I mention one piece from the pianoforte music, I am in no doubt as to which it shall be. *La Cathédrale engloutie* was the first thing of Debussy's that made me feel his greatness, and it remains at the top. One doesn't easily relate the language and thought of Browning's great musical fantasy, *Abt Vogler*, to the work of modernists, and it is therefore the measure of Debussy's achievement that words to which we would mentally fit some mighty organ-fugue of Bach should come to remembrance, not so very incongruously, when the last vibration of this noble tone-poem has died away:

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;  
Gone! and the good tears start . . .

If you find a reluctance to make that association yourself, imagine this work disinterred by some antiquarian of the future and read at the key-board. With the added dignity of centuries there is not much left in this case of the discrepancy we feel between contemporary music and the musician-faith of *Abt Vogler*.

While on the subject of Debussy there is a short digression I have to make, and it happens to be attached to *La Cathédrale engloutie* in particular. Mr. Ernest Newman, in his recent book on the Player-piano, warns the musical aspirant, who wants to make the acquaintance of Debussy, of the absurdity and hopelessness of trying to begin with *La Cathédrale*. He sketches out for the guidance of such a one a line of advance,

<sup>1</sup> I lift that perfect description from E. C. Somerville and Martin Ross—"There you are," said Jimmy Doyle, in a voice sad with the whole of pleasure, "that's the hunt" (*Dan Russel the Fox*)—and suspect they lifted it from Rossetti.

classifying a few pieces in three groups, progressive from the point of view of appreciation. Beyond these are to come the late works, which are again to be graded into successive steps. Finally, *La Cathédrale* may be approached, with trepidation, presumably, but not absolute despair.

This makes me feel as explosive as ever Mr. Newman himself has justly felt. It is, to my thinking, an extreme example of how the expert, even one of such exceptional brilliance and understanding, who has made it his special business to challenge and exorcise bogies, can completely ignore the human factor in music-appreciation, and completely mistake the psychology of the musical outsider. As it is an issue of real importance for some who may read these pages, and as it is an issue raised by this personal narrative (later, for example, in relation to Beethoven), let us have it out.

Theoretically this progressive way of tackling Debussy is sound; it follows the composer's own line of development. No doubt it seems to the expert musician, trying to be helpful, that this is the way in which the aspirant can most easily go forward. But he, seeking in music what it can give him, is far more likely to be attracted by the outstanding crags and by the peaks themselves than by the smooth *Gradus ad Parnassum*, unless he is a very docile and dull animal indeed. Theoretically Mr. Newman's scheme (which is intended as a suggestion to music-roll makers) is perfect and to be purred over. I remain sceptical; perhaps because my own acquaintance with Debussy began on exactly these lines—and came to a full stop. I suggest that in most cases the scheme would work out as follows: The simple and obvious *Arabesques* of the first stage would seem pretty enough (would probably seem like Chaminade or dilute Chopin), but, on the whole, hardly worth following up, with so many other things calling. The *Jardins sous la Pluie* and *Soirée dans Grenade* of the second group would strike more strange, but after the first surprise would be found trivial and boring.

Somewhere in the succeeding pieces the original impulse of interest and inquiry would almost surely be exhausted (*Et la Lune descend sur le Temple qui fut* would probably finish it off) and Debussy be reckoned unprofitable, unless—why, unless by any chance the aspirant, curious to know the worst, happened to make one wild plunge to what he understood to be the very nadir of this progressive course of incomprehensibility and dullness. Then he might be saved.

I think I can speak with, not less, but more authority than Mr. Newman on this matter, since the distance that separates me from him brings me so much the nearer to the case of those he has in mind. And I would deliberately start the inquirer with *La Cathédrale*. Incidentally I don't believe for a moment it will puzzle him or shock him as much as *Jardins sous la Pluie*. But the all-important point is that he will feel he has to do with something that matters; he will know there is something here worth getting hold of; he will be able to believe that this is great music, and that there really are people who care about it.

Musicians who are trying to help and foster popular appreciation of music, the possibilities of which are so widely opened up to-day by the player-piano and the gramophone, should begin by freeing their minds of every academical preconception; the line of training for appreciation is quite different from the logical course that the student of music may have to follow. If there had to be a rule I would rather go to the other extreme, and say, Bring out the best wine first. Begin with the most characteristic and most deeply-felt work of the composer that you know. I'm not prepared to maintain that rule absolutely; I don't know that it could be applied strictly to Beethoven, for example—though, as we shall see, I believe it will sometimes work with his sonatas. But I think it is fairly sound for the modern composers, in whom the difficulties that the trained mind has to overcome to a large extent don't exist for the untrained mind—which has quite a



different set of difficulties. In most cases it is pretty safe to say that a supreme example in any *genre* will have something universal about it. The work with which the artist has entered into full command of his medium and methods, and in which he has poured out his utmost, is the work that is most likely to establish some emotional contact even with the complete outsider. Of course, the latter ought to hear it adequately played, if possible; but failing that, I would still not hesitate to hand it to him in the form of a music-roll, abandoned, more or less, to the mercies of his own interpretation.

Mr. Newman says, 'Every care should be taken that the plain music-lover does not conceive an unreasoning and lasting prejudice against a composer simply through beginning his acquaintance with his work at the wrong end'. I thoroughly agree, but would ask Mr. Newman if he is quite sure he is not, in this case, running the plain music-lover into precisely that danger. I maintain that *La Cathédrale* is very much less likely to bore the plain music-lover than most pieces of the middle stage, and that it will educate him into a genuine love of Debussy (supposing he is one who can be brought there at all) in a tenth of the time that a systematic, graded approach would take. The man who begins with it will travel backwards far more quickly than another will travel forwards. And I doubt if the docile aspirant, who starts at the bottom, will ever fully enjoy the early and middle things until he, too, has been to the top and come back to them again.

To return from this digression and come to a conclusion about Debussy. When all has been said about the delicate art he developed—his tenuous atmospheres, his feeling after the inner essence of things—it remains true that his music can never succeed in putting out of countenance the art of earnest-minded excitable people, the art of Wagner, for example, as the art of Wagner puts out of countenance Italian opera. There is a deeper reason for this than the mere fact that

Debussy happens to be a light-weight, and a light-weight doesn't challenge outside his own class—a reason that questions not only his achievement but his tendency.

Taking Debussy very seriously, he stands for a sort of vision which sees so far into the infinite significances that the concrete drama of life is diminished to a tiny play of puppets rather than magnified into melodrama. I feel I am voicing an impression of this music that ought to be recognizable, if I say that *Debussy depersonalises the world*. Now the infinity which lies at the end of that line is the emptiness of infinite space. The coolness of his music, which strikes so fresh and pleasing, this coolness of Nature, or of human passions seen small, is really the dropping of the temperature towards *minus* 273° C.—absolute zero. I am not going to launch out into philosophy on the point. It is sufficient to say that the best philosophic instinct of our time seems more and more to find the trail of truth lying through personality, and not away from it. Therefore it becomes difficult to believe that Debussy, or the tendency which he represents, is on the main-road, as Wagner was on the main-road, of that eternal search which is Art.

#### § 4

We are now the better prepared to try a cast forward in the opposite direction, with Wagner himself for our guide. Wagner himself leads us to that point where the boundaries of his art are breakable, and almost broken, by his own hunger for regions beyond.

The view of the world revealed in the music-dramas is a pessimism. Wagner sees human personality and all human desirings and aspirings against the background of an impersonal, loveless universe, into which every drama of life must ultimately be swallowed up with tragedy. The one virtue in such a world, the only possible basis of a morality, is sympathy, compassion. By sympathy one identifies oneself with suffering

deluded humanity; by sympathy one takes sides with the futile, doomed figures of men, rather than, like the Stoic, with the nihilism of the universe. This pessimism is the most religious of all atheisms. It might be described, fairly accurately, as Christianity with God left out—

If Thou, O God, the Christ did'st leave,  
In Him, not Thee, I do believe;  
To Jesus dying, all alone,  
To His dark Cross, not Thy bright Throne,  
My hopeless hands will cleave.

It is hardly necessary to dwell on the peculiar fitness of such a view of the world to be the matrix of a mighty and most poignant art. It has temperatures and stresses able to forge the transcendent expression of itself that we behold in the *Liebestod*—in which Isolde's self-assertion touches even an utterly irrational triumph on the very edge of the eternal dark.

But there is no stability in this system. It is not possible for any man to hold it against its own violent pressure to go backward or forward. It is a discord which demands resolution. Resolution can come, either by the emptying of personality of every passion, until, self-annihilated, it becomes one with the cosmos—which is the Buddhist Nirvana; or else by love, which believes in personality, and follows it out into the unknown, and will not let it go except into an ultimate reality akin to it—which means a faith like the Christian faith.

Wagner's thought seemed to disrupt in both directions, or rather, perhaps, his thought went one way and his feeling another. *Parsifal* is one grand noble confusion. In form it is Christian; in content largely Buddhist. Side by side are the two incompatible ideas of redemption by love, and redemption by renunciation of love and everything else. While its intelligence seems to gravitate to the latter, its feeling reaches upward to the former, but never attains the point of faith, in spite of all the place that is given to the word. For the work to have been crowned with that consummation would have



meant a definite breaking of boundaries. Beating up from the human side, as Wagner does here, to the utmost limits of thought and feeling, there should come the breaking in at last of light from the other side. If *Parsifal* has found a way of life we want to see it suddenly shining as the eternal way. Out of what seemed an impersonal, loveless universe we wait for the voice of Browning's poem,

O heart I made, a heart beats here.

That is the reconciliation the drama strains towards. But, in spite of celestial choirs and various symbolisms, that is just what does not happen, and what could not have happened except by the emergence of a new Wagner, with a new heaven and earth, and a new music.

Here some one protests. What has all this to do with music? I think I can truly say that a purely musical impression is antecedent to any theorizing I have indulged in. In actual performance the music of the *finale* of *Parsifal* seems to me unsatisfying. The failure is striking when we remember, for comparison, *The Ring* and *Tristan*. The four parts of *The Ring* came into being to lead up to the tremendous close of *Götterdämmerung*; the whole drama and the whole music of *Tristan* move towards the gesture of the *Liebestod*. They are both overwhelmingly impressive embodiments of Wagner's tragic faith; they ask for the quintessence of his music. But the *Erlösung* fails to put that possible or impossible crown on *Parsifal* which would be the only perfect fulfilment. The music that would crown this work could not be fused and moulded in the old matrix, between the opposing pressures of Love and Death, of living Personality and unknowing, uncaring Fate. Wagner was, indeed, drawn on to enlarge his philosophy (vaguely and ambiguously), but he could not change his art. He could break what was new ground for him in word and symbol, but he could not attain the new music. So we wait for a music, which the drama presages

and demands, but which never materializes. One wants more than the exquisite decoration, interweaving, soaring and sublimating of the main themes; one wants some unimaginable transformation of them, or else some great new theme altogether. No, more still—something that we can feel lies outside Wagner's range; one cannot imagine it as continuous with this music whose proud fires, as they die, clothe themselves with ever richer vesture of dissolving colour. But are we not asking for the impossible? If we are conscious of the limits of Wagner, is it not because we have arrived at the limits of music itself? If so, there is no more to be said. But one has come to know a music which seems actually to express what those poor fond symbols of the hovering dove and the glowing Grail try to suggest; a music which comes to meet Wagner's, with a revelation that is like an answer to its upward straining; a music whose intuition or faith has leapt from the pity and love of humanity to a love that is at the heart of all things. There are moments in some of Beethoven's late slow movements when we find ourselves breathlessly still, surrounded by a light that strikes downward from above, infinitely remote, infinitely near.

I am not making the insane suggestion that Beethoven could have finished Wagner's work. But I do feel that, through Beethoven, we know there exist possibilities of musical expression, out of which alone could come the ending that would crown *Parsifal*—supposing, what is indeed unthinkable, that the intensest intimacies of chamber music could be realized in the atmosphere of dramatic and spectacular art.

Let us remember what the image of the descending dove is presumably intended to recall—'a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son'. That is, the suggestion that Parsifal has not merely found a noble and beautiful way to make the best of a bad world, but that the world was made for him to find this way; he is not silhouetted, like Tristan and Isolde, against the empty skies, but is accepted as one with the

ultimate reality behind all things. It is easy to adopt the symbol, but vain to do so when it outgoes the vision and faith of the composer. Only in some of Beethoven's last works have we seemed to hear at rare moments the music in which such a symbol would not be a forced and artificial intrusion.

It would be anticipating to say more. Wagner brings us on our pilgrimage; he leads us to the boundary of his art, and it is all but breaking through, not towards an art of the future, but towards that master of the past whom he himself believed to have spoken the last word in pure music.

### § 5

Somewhere in the middle of this period there came a comparatively brief interlude of Tchaikovsky.

How richly satisfying Tchaikovsky can be at a certain stage of development! No one else has such throbbing, warm-blooded themes, that are just all one could wish; and themes, too, that seem to bring back some old, far-off glamour of stage tragedy. There are traits in his music (I mention, almost at random, the first movement of the pianoforte trio) that always seem to call up vaguely from far-back days the close, exciting air of the theatre, and a distant stage on which things passionately sad and romantic are happening—a flavour like a salt taste in the mouth.<sup>1</sup>

The pilgrim comes to Tchaikovsky as a natural passing on in his search for thrills, more poignant and more harrowing; and for power, wild, ramping, stunning power. And Tchaikovsky, as it seems to me now, represents the blind-alley into which this line of seeking leads one. There was nothing beyond, in the way of more abandon or further devices and resources to express it. This music was a *cul-de-sac*, and, ultimately, a barren one. It gathered up the seeker and led

<sup>1</sup> This last simile sounds a bit mysterious to myself, when I consider it in cold blood. Its elucidation would need the help of a psycho-analyst. I leave it on the off-chance that some one may greet it with recognition.



him to bafflement. The thirst that it stimulated it could not quench. It was a music which was for ever surging up, full of passion, desire or fear; and it never attained. It could rush you excitingly up the slope of a climax, but there was nothing at the top. After every towering assault came the inevitable subsiding in weary listlessness or sullen muttering.

The Pathetic Symphony, as might be expected, was my first flame; but the warmest and longest passion—not yet cold—was for the Symphony in E minor, and particularly for the *Andante cantabile*, in which Tchaikovsky is at the top of his power. Many days had my Player, taking full advantage of the *con alcuna licenza* direction, to render it, morning, noon and night, before its enthralling hold on one's senses began to slacken. I think I might say, as Johnson did of Burton's book, that it is the only composition that ever got me early out of bed. And in it could be found the typical example. At the top emotional point, where the second subject makes its most tremendous entry, a force of men might be rushing up a vast sweep of stairs to hurl themselves against iron doors. So furious is the onset that, at the exultant moment of shock, it seems as if the doors had burst; but after the first note of the theme, if ever they had shown a crack of light, they are seen as fast shut as before; and every other forlorn rush is doomed to break on them in vain. The failure is symbolic of the failure of all this music. In its very violence is the note of bafflement.

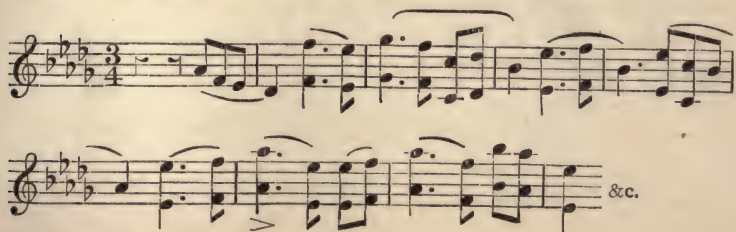
Tchaikovsky, I think, makes one suspect at last what may be a mournful truth—that every big and passionate musical climax has in it something of failure; you can't march your men up the hill without having to march them down again. I fancy Chopin once made an interesting attempt to evade this necessity. In the F major Ballade he builds up one of his most prodigious preparations: in the middle register the music beats fast, like the desperate pace of running feet; in the bass there are drum-rolls, and the plaintive little theme of a moment

before becomes the plunging stride of a giant beginning to go Berserk ; then, from the top, Kundry-like shrieks. While the music fights its way up to the critical modulation you wonder breathlessly what is going to happen, as a man might wonder while he was being hurled through the air in a motor smash. What awful thing is coming? What unheard-of statement can justify such a preparation? Comes the impact, with a crash. Instantly the whole accumulated tempest of sound is shut off, and into the silence enters, *pianissimo*, the little simple *andantino* tune with which the Ballade began. It is a gallant attempt to get to the top of a climax without having to come down on the other side—to give the impression of having broken through. Unfortunately, however (I'm going to spoil some reader's delight in the Ballade, and I'll probably get killed for it, but I can't resist the comparison), the effect has a dangerous resemblance to the inadequate novelist's description of that motor-smash, and his falling-back on a row of dots followed by, 'When I opened my eyes a pale face of angelic beauty was bent over me, and a sweet, low voice was saying, "Drink this"'.

Tchaikovsky was more responsible than any one else for a dream, belonging to those days, of one of the possible uses of being a millionaire. Concertos are perhaps somewhat at a discount, but if there is one person whose lot seems to me enviable, it is the fine artist, playing, with a first-rank orchestra, music big enough to set him free. To have the great concert instrument under one's hands, trained and tuned to a hair, like a race-horse, in all its sensitiveness of touch and waiting energy ; to feel the music towering round one ; and to be lifted, yet commanding, on its crest ; to strike the deep note that swings the whole body of sound through the air to a new key-platform, and sets it there as on bed-rock—that must be one of the most glorious experiences that life can yield. My dream involved the building of such a pianoforte as never was. The Queen's Hall might hold it. The bass

strings should stretch from floor to ceiling; and where the common or drawing-room instrument is a trichord, mine, in the upper octaves, should be a centichord at least. The action would have to be operated electrically, and, of course, it should have a player-action also fitted—I didn't figure myself standing by, a mere listener, while other people exploited the resources of my pianissimo-fortissimo. Then, Sir Henry Wood's and the London Symphony orchestras being massed, reinforced by the Hallé, the Scottish, and a few others from the provinces, and Arthur Nikisch being entrusted with the bâton—but taking his time from me, the solo player-pianist—a rendering of Tchaikovsky's B flat minor Concerto would be given—the sort of rendering that would be recorded by seismographical instruments.

It is true I couldn't see a very large concerto repertory for the pianissimo-fortissimo. The Beethoven G major and E flat major seemed to have such long stretches in which one could not help feeling the hearers must be bored. The beloved Schumann one I couldn't quite see at home on my instrument—so much the worse for it—my instrument, I mean. On the other hand the Brahms works, especially the D minor, were very eligible. But, on the whole, the dream centred and had its being in the first three minutes of Tchaikovsky's B flat minor, and was concerned with nothing else. I think the ambition must have been born on a day of storm, when, under the cliffs, one found that mighty, mouth-filling song a thing to shout, and thank its maker for, while the great sea itself put in the crashing chords of the pianoforte part:





Tchaikovsky certainly could find tunes. That, for the *Andantino* of this same work, he should have had the gift of another miraculous thing must seem to composers an act of shameless favouritism on the part of a musical Providence. Reverting from the melting memory of that fairy touch to the colossal fist of the opening tune, I want to say of the latter, how curiously successful it is in catching the movement and effect of incoherent natural forces, and suggesting the rough-hewn, formless song that emerges—as when, for example, on a rocky shore, in a blinding whirl of wind and spume, the roar of the breakers comes through to one in snatches; a big sea up-tosses to that dominant, and another instantly reiterates it; nor is there lacking a dizzy little leap beyond. . . .

I recognize the voice of another who has known these gigantesque dreams and cravings (which, for me, are associated with Tchaikovsky) when I find 'W. N. P. Barbellion' (author of *The Journal of a Disappointed Man*) writing: 'I was once walking on the sands by the sea when a great wave of joyfulness swept across me. I stood up on a rock and waved my stick about—and sang. I wanted the sands to be crowded with a great male-voice chorus—hundreds of thousands of men—so many that there should be no standing room for more. I imagined myself standing above them, a physical and musical Titan on the top of a high mountain as high as Mont Blanc, conducting with a bâton as large as a barge pole. The breakers would boom an accompaniment, but the chorus would be heard above everything else, and even God Himself would turn from schemes for new planets (and less hopeless ones than this) to fling a regret for injustice done to such spirited people!' <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the essay 'Crying for the Moon'.

# PART THREE

## § 1

ALL this time, from the very beginning, you must not think of me as a stranger to Beethoven; that would be impossible for any one interested in music at all; but, on the whole, Beethoven's music had been of no importance. A general consent about his name no doubt bred something of impatient antagonism, as it always will do. When the local mayor tells an interviewer that his favourite books are Shakespeare and the Bible, that pretty well does for Shakespeare's and the Bible's chance with the youth who has just discovered *Zarathustra*. In music Beethoven, unfortunately, is the composer most cumbered with the sort of blind homage it is easy to scorn. Faced with more weighty testimony, discerning and unmistakably sincere—well, I was an outsider, on my own; authority in the musical world didn't affect me, except to cause a genuine perplexity and deepen the sense that some one was very much outside, either myself, or the rest of the world. Privately I suspected the rest of the world; outwardly I said simply, after innumerable trials, that Beethoven was not for me.

Of course, you understand, there were many things I enjoyed well enough; and I always made an exception in favour of the *Waldstein* Sonata—it is curious, by the by, that the *Waldstein* is the only work that seemed to recede, and give a less impression of beauty and depth and strength when I really began to waken up to Beethoven.

I can recall some of my complaints and criticisms of those days. It is a humiliating exercise, yet interesting, too, in a way, to see how sometimes one had got hold of fragments of

truth—then to realize against what a different background one sees them now. In other cases to acknowledge how incredibly blind and wide of the mark one was.

Many criticisms that I used to make still seem to me to be true. There are great masses of Beethoven's music that, for me, are barren, empty of any spiritual content, purely perfunctory. A more deadly charge is, that often movements which one must admit to be serious and fine are, in effect, a little boring; slow movements like those of the Fourth and Fifth symphonies are in that category for me. In the 'C minor' especially I seem to feel the tightness of grip, which makes the opening so impressive, persisting in the slow movement, where it is out of place. Beethoven is sometimes in danger of handling a song like a sword, or like a hammer. Often when he has lifted you up he seems himself callously unmoved, and lets you down with a jar in the next movement—*finale* of the Opus 97 Trio, for example. He will re-commence an episode in a new key that you feel is probably technically right and progressive and all that sort of thing, but that, none the less, snaps the emotional thread. In such a way all the dramatic reality is suddenly knocked out of the splendid *Leonora No. 3*, as far as I am concerned; and in that great movement of Opus 106, of which I shall soon be speaking, the one flaw is such a new beginning, involving a break of emotional continuity. Probably musicians don't feel this; but I am quite prepared to give myself away all round.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Walker commented on this when it was first written: 'I rather gather from your remark on *Leonora No. 3* that you do not know that very many modern musicians do agree with you strongly on this particular point; though personally I do not. You, like many others, feel that dramatic reality involves progress, movement in time; to me it can quite well be a stationary thing, as no doubt the *Leonora*, as a structural organism, is. Beyond any doubt, you have very many (possibly most) modern musicians with you in feeling a certain rebelliousness at recapitulation as being in itself something of an anti-emotional feature in a scheme. I personally do not, though in many ways I am an ultra-modernist.' I have let the text stand for the sake of appending Dr. Walker's note.



It is far easier to find fault with Beethoven than with Chopin ; Chopin is sensitive and alert, and, whatever he is doing, always has his loins girt up. But the whole set of one's mind has changed ; one can cheerfully admit reproaches now ; there are spots on the sun.

On the other hand I recall things said—friends, perhaps, would recall them less reluctantly—that sound very strange and remote now. I used to say that Beethoven's music was always happy, and never anything but happy—happiness of every possible sort and shade, from jolliness to ecstasy, from good-humoured cheeriness to cloudless serenity. I think the reproach implied in this was partly a suspicion of vulgarity (the last movement of the *Les Adieux* Sonata, for example, seemed to represent nothing so much as the excitement and tail-chasing demonstrations of a dog at the home-coming), partly (and this concerned the loftier music) an accusation of shallow optimism. 'I can feel no passion in Beethoven,' I would say (please remember that this hurts me far more than it does you). 'Take the sonata that devoted admirers have called *Appassionata*: look at the first sentence of it: could anything be more expressive of perfect poise and balance and self-possession? The composer who begins thus sets out on no tempest-ridden flight ; he has himself well in hand for an exercise in musicianship.' (The rack could twist out of me no more appalling confession.) And so on. Having toiled up the steeps with Wagner and Tchaikovsky, I refused to believe that any one could have topped the peak with a firm mouth and untrembling hands. The feet that should be beautiful on the mountain would not be immaculate, but muddy and bleeding.

## § 2

In the first part of this record, at the point whence my musical journey began, stands a little *salon* piece of Chopin's, which led on to the discovery of a music of sensuous beauty

and thrill. At the beginning of the second part I have told how a performance of *Tristan und Isolde* opened up for me a larger vision of music's function, more commensurate with the whole drama of life. I come now to another land-mark of my pilgrimage, and for the third time to the threshold of a new world.

On a momentous day there arrived by accident, in a box of music-rolls, one that I had never heard nor heard of. It was the *Adagio sostenuto* of the Hammerklavier Sonata, Opus 106. That was the first thing of Beethoven's that ever shook me, and went on moving me more and more profoundly. I said, pleasantly, that it was probably regarded by musicians as an inferior work. But I knew differently. This was at the top; neither I nor any one could question that. Later on I opened a book on Beethoven, and had the new experience of finding myself come into line at last with the word of authority—'one of the supreme things in all music,' it was called.

So I arrived at Beethoven, not without a feeling that I was the last that ever burst into that well-known sea. Looking back, I am driven to think it must have been the sheer size of this particular movement that overcame me. Just as the merest philistine is awed at last, and knows an authentic emotion, in some vast cathedral, so it must have been with me. Such a one is blind to the essential beauty and significance which can be as truly revealed in small proportions as in large; he must be clubbed by a prodigious embodiment of them. The key that unlocks his vulgar homage is that he is in the presence of 'the —est in the world'. Yet if that assurance should come to him not from without, but from within, as some vague instinctive judgement of value, even his homage would be a tribute, and might be the beginning of wisdom.

Now the immediate and overmastering impression that this *Adagio* makes is one of size. Is there anything in music that

carries such a sense of vastness? With the first grave steps one enters a cathedral of sound, of such immense and solemn grandeur as surely must touch with awe even the wayfaring man who has wandered in. The massive depth of the part-writing, the soaring heights, dim and soft though the revelation of them is, are the very thunder of beauty, that makes even the deaf man hear. I know it is not easy to believe that Opus 106 can have much to give to any one capable of saying about the *Appassionata* 'what I said, nor choose repeat', but in some such way I think it is to be explained. One was simply bowed down at last before the thing unchallengeably great, which no imagined comparison could dwarf.

This piece of music, coming, as I have told, out of the blue, effected something like the bursting of a dam. Things happened fast; there was a flood of Beethoven; his music came rushing in upon me, not bit by bit, but all one's accumulated knowledge suddenly in motion, transformed, energized from death into life. Almost hourly odd fragments would ring in my head with a new meaning, while I walked in the street, or in the night as I was falling asleep. Day unto day uttered speech; night unto night showed knowledge. Particularly that grandest sonata of Beethoven's prime, which I had gone out of my way to blaspheme, began to glow and burn. To think only of those fierce driving passages in the first movement that culminate in great dizzy moments, when you seem to be swung out over a precipice, with towns and people 'small as emmets' far below!

I suppose it was an experience as near 'conversion' as art can show; the sort of experience that cuts one's life in two. I know that nothing could have been more incredible to the man I was than to foresee what I would now be trying to say of Beethoven; and no words are adequate, as I look back, to express my sense of the darkness in which that man lived.

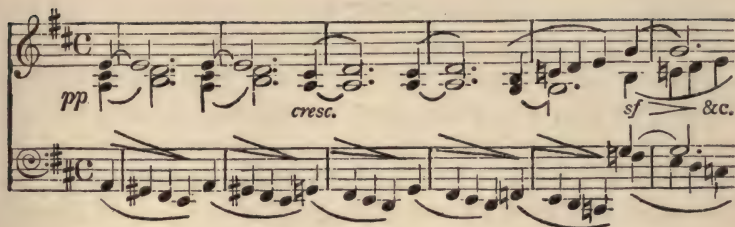
I have my own theories of how I would try to help any one else in my case, sticking where I stuck so long. I think, for



example, a bridge could be built out to any one coming from the direction of Chopin, with the Sonatas Op. 10<sup>3</sup> and Op. 31<sup>2</sup> for two of its piers (having chiefly in mind the slow movement of the D major, and the first movement of the D minor).

Yet it may well happen to others to arrive at Beethoven by the same topsy-turvy way as myself; some one of those third period works into which any reasonable and well-regulated music-lover is supposed to be initiated last of all, may first make one aware of what then seems so plain—the mighty energy that is being ridden, dominated and held, in many a masterpiece which one had let pass by as though it were a formal parade. I said that, in a humanized music history, Debussy might quite well come before Bach; and, with a young generation copiously nourished on Strauss and Scriabin and Stravinsky—like children familiar with caviare before they have been fond of chocolate—it is not unlikely that the world of Beethoven will become more and more accessible by the wrong end.

Fairly entered on the Sonatas, I worked upward and downward from the lofty point where I had happened to find a footing. I recollect one impression that came to me among the earlier works, which perhaps throws a little light on my new-found zest for music of a type that had seemed dull and unimportant before. I seemed to catch sight of the full meaning of the dictum that a work of art has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Two of its terms I appreciated already, but the central one would have seemed to me once to have no special function except to fill in the gap between the first and the last. Now I began to get sometimes an impression new in kind, a peculiarly exhilarating sense of the drive of development; of being at one particular moment in the thick of it—the music growing out of what had gone before and reaching forward to that which was to come. Let me quote these bars from the first movement of the Op. 10<sup>3</sup> Sonata, though, of course, they can convey the thrill of vitality I am trying to define only to those familiar with the context:



Truly a section of music is well called a *movement*, when it is like this one. The four-note figure has the eager energy of some unit of life seen under a microscope, rushing into new combinations, perpetuating itself: an epitome of the torrent of vitality that pours through the world of matter.

### § 3

Naturally, however, the strongest interest and curiosity centred in the immediate neighbours of Opus 106, those other late sonatas that one never seemed to hear played—for fairly obvious reasons. The heavy scoring was no deterrent to player-piano explorations, and I came to know very well indeed that family of five, the centenarians, in their opus numbers, of the Sonatas.

Can one call them a family? They stand apart from all the rest, but also they stand apart, still more widely, from one another. Never was a family in which each member was so unique and strongly-marked an individual. Though they are inevitably grouped together, I am realizing at the present moment how each of these dominating personalities is able to make one forget about the others. It is easier to trace, here and there in any one of them, resemblances to earlier sonatas, resemblances of the sort that one notes between the grown man and his boyhood portraits, than to find any genuine kinship among themselves—though all are equal in stature and maturity, and though all have certain technical features

(fugal writing, for example) in common, and more or less exclusively to themselves.

The E major Sonata, Opus 109, is the least giant-like, the least masculine, the sister, shall we say (if we, nevertheless, retain the family bond), of this band of brothers; not indeed the little sister, but virginal. With what adorable grace she comes to us across the meadows! How warm and vibrant are the tones of her voice as she speaks! The agitation and high-strung resolve of the *Prestissimo* are still feminine; while the theme of the last movement, one of Beethoven's tenderest and loveliest, becomes perfectly bewitching when, after the variations, the Sonata ends with the simple re-statement of it:



Curious—we may incidentally remark—how in some instances the value of a theme is enhanced out of all proportion by its recall. When the opening subject of the Opus 101 Sonata reappears for a moment in the transition between the slow movement and the finale we feel as if we had failed till then to appreciate it. The unexpected quotation of the Scherzo, in the exuberant last movement of the C minor Symphony, is a more dramatic and more famous example of the same astonishing effectiveness of this simplest of devices.

The following Sonata, in A flat, Opus 110, alone of these five, one will occasionally find possessed by the ordinary amateur. One does not feel inclined to rank these intensely individual works relatively to one another, or to give praise



by putting one above the others. Each has its own sphere. As regards this one, I wonder only how many unknown lives have received it from Beethoven's hands, and found in its pages their dearest, most sacred, most intimate possession.

We speak sometimes of religious music, but a description which we give to any music of a solemn or mystical turn is too vague for this Sonata. It is more than religious; it is Christian; it has the Christ-spirit. I mean quite definite things. Here is a purity that is kind; a holiness that is yet infinitely understanding, infinitely pitiful, infinitely patient. 'Human' is one word that offers itself again and again—divinely, touchingly human. How perfectly this music knows, and loves, and speaks to the human soul! Knows it in all its frailty—'animula, blandula, vagula'—and knows it yet as a breath breathed of God. How intimately it communes with us! What a deep response it draws from us! Wagner, in the third act of *Parsifal*, embodied the deed of the woman who wept over the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; but it seems to me that nowhere, in all the groping expression of man in art, do we feel, as this music makes us feel, the sort of influences that flowed out from the chief figure of that scene—the humbling, softening beauty of goodness that bows one to the dust; the divine gentleness which makes the heart burn within us, and out of the dust draws from us the passionate response that offers life and soul and all.<sup>1</sup>

All this relates to the quiet intimate intercourse of the first movement. The Scherzo which follows I do not like; there is some blight of barrenness over it; the *trio* I hate; it is as the crackling of thorns under a pot. But it is all most surely part of the intention of the Sonata. I suppose it had to be,

<sup>1</sup> A friend sends me a quotation from Edward Carpenter's 'Angels' Wings': 'We have in the opening chords one of those subjects of profound pity and redemption worked out in the very consummation of Beethoven's art . . . the *Arioso dolente* with its Christ-like pity . . .' I also have it pointed out to me that this sonata was composed while Beethoven was working at the *Missa solennis*.

before the beautiful song of the *Arioso dolente*—of the Via Dolorosa, shall we say—and the wonderful speaking recitatives which lead to the Fugue.

Are we meant to find in the Fugue what the Scherzo misses? It begins so differently, with no forced rush of gaiety, so quietly, so humbly, so undistinguished in its spirit of resolve. The entry of the counterpoint puts its delicious momentary blindness on my eyes; and from that moment the music has an inner light, a lamp of life, that shines out ever more brightly while the Fugue grows strong and grand. It is interrupted, to let back once more the beautiful sorrow of the *Arioso dolente*. After those strains have died away in a grave chord that is slowly reiterated in gradual *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, there is a silence. Then a lifting up of the eyes to where comes softly from above the inversion of the fugue, a fragile, new-born thing. It is a moment full of a feeling that makes me think of the pictorial seer's vision of a lamb in the midst of the throne of the universe; a moment of extraordinary solemnity and sacredness. Why it should be so, with these elemental single notes . . . But if one knew that there would be no more mystery in music. The rest is all glad; the rhythm becomes delicately gay—an inner lightness of heart, that soon looks out to find all things made new. It is a spirit set free, a spirit on top of life, more than conqueror, that, with the most glorious confidence, climbs the steeps towards a goal ever more clearly visible. The soaring music attains the key in which it comes home at last, with an outburst of triumph and one great sweep of harp-strings, in which we cannot fail to recognize a final fulfilment of the soft harp-strains in the first movement.

I have an impression that many who know their Beethoven well have not heard all there is to hear in this Fugue. Remembering how, when I first heard it, it seemed to me little more than a pattern in sounds, I realize that there are perhaps no pages in Beethoven more at the mercy of the pianist; and

I realize my own good fortune in knowing one interpreter able to make the hearing of it one of the most subtly moving, and one of the most exalting, experiences in music.

I ask again, are we meant to find in the Fugue what the Scherzo misses? I have no wish to force a moral out of a sonata; but it seems to stare us in the face. Beethoven could write in the vein of gaiety or joviality—no one better. But somehow not at this time and place. The music of the Scherzo flags, and has to be continually whipped up by sad-eyed men; the laughter of fools is the crackling of thorns under a pot.

Tchaikovsky also introduced the mockery of merriment as a tragic element in his sixth symphony. But Beethoven got further. This sonata, unlike Tchaikovsky's last symphony, is not surnamed 'Pathétique'. Nor does it merely find in pallid renunciation some bare escape from the tragedy of life, and a poor sort of peace. We are not shown a blessed alternative in the pious strains of what is succinctly and sufficiently described in organ albums as a 'soft voluntary'. 'Eat, drink and be merry', the forlorn lie of the Scherzo, becomes the clarion truth of the Fugue. There is the greatness of Beethoven. On the loftiest heights, here as elsewhere, he is not afraid to make music that is gay. In this he is once more strangely near to that great artist of life, who, indeed, showed men that it was a land of husks which had 'eat, drink and be merry' written over it, and, nevertheless, was not afraid of seeming to contradict himself by writing up the same words over the soul's ultimate home-country, 'Let us eat and make merry'; and did not feel that he spoilt the story by making it end with the sound of music and feasting and dancing—the very things that the Prodigal had gone to the far country to seek.

The shallowest of lies may turn into the profoundest of truths. It wasn't only the rich fool, hugging himself, who said, Eat, drink, and be merry. Has any one ever thought



that almost the last word of Jesus to his friends was practically identical? It was transformed on his lips because he could prefix it with, *This is my body . . . This is my blood . . .* By some parallel transformation, represented in the intervening music, by some purification from self through suffering, does this Sonata break into what we might also call a sacramental view of life. After the *Arioso dolente* the Fugue takes the message out of the mouth of the Scherzo, where it was forced and false, and turns it from a pitiful pretence into a glad and confident vision of reality.

I do not wish, however, to base my own judgement of the A flat Sonata, as not only religious, but definitely near to the spirit of Jesus, on what may seem mere ingenuities of parallelism. It is not by construing in it any deliberate plan or programme that one brings evidence. The evidence is direct; it is the actual content of feeling in the music. The reader may be sceptical of such evidence. Between the fond imagination of the music-hearer, and the possible posing of the music-writer, we have a language neither very tangible nor very trustworthy. It is not always safe to infer from the word-poem what sort of feelings really went to the making of it; how much less safe in so moonshiny a medium as music! As far as most music is concerned I fully share the scepticism; I know what wild and diverse meanings can be, and are, read into some of it. As concerning this particular music I have a conviction that the expression of certain things is there as unmistakably as lines in a spectrum; that they could not be simulated; that they reveal facts of feeling and character in the composer as infallibly as characteristic lines in a solar spectrum reveal the presence of corresponding elements in the sun. I could be sure of them in the face of all biographical evidence.

As a matter of fact the Beethoven revealed in this Sonata (not in it alone, but, in some ways, I think, most definitely in it) is not easy to reconcile with the mental picture of the man

most of us have ready-made. That prophetic figure, sombre, violent, proud, sincere, uncompromising, chaste, is still far from the tenderness, the self-forgetful lowliness, the infinite understanding, pity and patience of this Christ-like utterance in music.

If we turn to his writings we may fare no better. Frequently we find ourselves furthest away when we seemed most near. For example: 'Socrates and Jesus have been my models'—what could be more hopelessly unreal? How any one even sets about modelling himself on Socrates is unintelligible to me. The frequent prayers, deeply felt as they are, are nearer to the Psalms than to the Gospels: 'O God, aid me! Thou wilt not leave me entirely in the hands of men; because I do not wish to make a covenant with injustice! Hear the prayer which I make to Thee, that at least for the future I may live with my Carl!—O cruel fate, implacable destiny! No, no, my unhappiness will never end.'

Nevertheless, this particular utterance puts us on the track. It is in the human drama referred to here that we get hints of the vein of finest gold in the record of Beethoven's life. It was to this Carl, the ingrate, the ne'er-do-well nephew whose guardianship Beethoven had assumed, that he writes:

'My dear son! No more of this! Come to my arms. You shall not hear one harsh word. I will receive you with the same love. We will talk over what is to be done for your future in a friendly manner. On my word of honour there will be no reproach. That would do no good. You have nothing to expect from me but sympathy and the most loving care. Come, come to the faithful heart of your father. Come immediately you receive this letter, come to this house.' And on the envelope: 'If you do not come you will surely kill me.' Again: 'Spoilt as you are, that should not make it difficult to teach you to be simple and true; my heart has suffered so much by your hypocritical conduct, and it is difficult for me to forget.' A little later Carl attempted

suicide, and, as one biographer says, it was Beethoven who nearly died; he 'became suddenly an old man of seventy'.

The letters to Carl, even in chosen extracts, may fail to touch the casual reader, he may find their wording unimpressive; but we cannot fail to recognize that they are the token in another medium of that for which we are looking. The depths are there, obscured often, rather than manifested, by the ill-chosen, second-hand, even unreal words; but the same depths, clear down into which we sometimes see through the music.

I have dealt here, à propos of this Sonata, with a problem that, for the thoughtful lover of Beethoven, arises even more formidably in connexion with some of the music we shall soon be considering. I may as well add all I have to say.

The spiritual content of some of the last works is so wonderful that it becomes difficult to relate, especially in certain marked qualities, to the personality of its creator. Insensibly there comes, for me at any rate, a gap between the Beethoven of music and the Beethoven of history. What I want to say is: Whenever this happens it is the former which is the real Beethoven. We are not the victims of our own imaginings and powers of idealization. In the case of this man the inside evidence and the infallible evidence is in his music. We cannot expect to get from any other sources all the self-revelation that flowed into it. All we ask is that the biographical picture should leave room for it. And does it not? No one can read what is written of, or written by, Beethoven without feeling from what *is* told that a great part remains untold. The man who was passed through such an alchemy of souls—illness after illness, deafness, poverty, wounded love, loneliness, till at last he wrote in his note-book: 'For you there is happiness only in your art'.—In his art!—We remember Schindler's description of that attempted rehearsal of *Fidelio* in 1822, which ended in confusion and deadlock, the deaf



composer turning from side to side, trying to read the expression of different faces and understand the difficulty, no one having the heart to say, 'Go away, poor unfortunate one; you cannot conduct.' Till the scene was ended by his rushing from the hall to his house, where he threw himself down, buried his face in his hands and remained silent and motionless—'During all my connexion with Beethoven I do not know of any day which I can compare with this awful day in November. He had been smitten to the heart.' The man, I repeat, who was passed through such a bitter alchemy of souls, and in whom the resultant is characterized ever more fully towards the end by tenderness and joy, had, assuredly, an inner life that remains unrevealed, until, in certain passages of his late music, we are conscious of depths of faith and mystical heights of vision, that are, it may be, the supreme achievements in expression of the human spirit. Not in deed, not in word, but in music is the truth about the man Beethoven revealed. He talked, though he talked better than most, yet 'like poor Poll', in comparison with that angel voice into which his music sometimes melts, and through which it is impossible and unthinkable that insincerity, unreality, or commonplace could come.

The Sonata in C minor, Op. 111, in some ways resembles the *Appassionata*. The last sonata of the volume recalls in its outward form, and even (with a difference) in its general type of feeling, the greatest pages in the central body of the book. But it is a parallel carried out on a stage of the most immense breadth.

As far as the first movement is concerned, few of us, except in certain moods, would prefer this setting in an elemental world, where the forces are too cosmic to notice us, where the more vivid and piercing effects are put off as childish things. The stark, contained power of the *Maestoso* introduction, the sublime coda, in which the music finally runs out in such

a perfect level close, remain most clearly printed in the memory.

The second and last movement (the Sonata consists of just two large movements) is in C major, and Beethoven-lovers have not failed to feel a fitness in the fact that the great volume should end in that key.

Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,  
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—yes,  
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,  
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep;  
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place  
is found,  
The C Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.<sup>1</sup>

The movement is an Arietta with variations. Like many others I have sometimes felt disappointed that Beethoven so often put his slow movements into variation form. One seemed to catch sight of the composer's limitations; it was like a confession that he was impotent to give to the material that higher unity which its place in the living organism of a sonata demanded. Indeed, if a very ignorant man may speak on such a point, I think it is in the handling of those slow movements that are his greatest inspirations that Beethoven, if anywhere, betrays at times, right up to the end, an element of uncertainty and tentativeness. But from this movement I first got some dim idea of what the variation form (apart from its own particular potentialities) could achieve in the way of organized unity.

Here is no mere string of lovely beads, and no mere unfolding, one by one, of latent qualities and aspects of the subject, but a continuous, cumulative effect of which no fragment could convey a faint impression. The movement grows round about the theme, clothing it with more and more abundant life. The rhythm doubles and re-doubles; once again we see that Beethoven was not afraid of laughter and tumult on the serene

<sup>1</sup> *Abt Vogler.*

heights. There are those voices that he seemed to love in his later years, the lowest and highest registers, the grave sweet tones of bearded angels, the shrill cherubs. The ineffable song is tossed and caught and echoed until the air is quivering with it, until it seems to vibrate through all space, until heaven and earth are full of the glory of God.

There are some things in music that one imagines would be comforting and healing; and then, if the actual need comes, they are trivial or unbearable.<sup>1</sup> This last movement of Beethoven's last sonata is one of the rare things I know that can stand the real test. Change a couple of words and you can say of it:

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)  
Hark;—and upon thy so sore loss  
Shall sound the traffic of Jacob's ladder,  
Pitched between heaven and Charing Cross.

#### § 4

Leaving now the Sonatas, I must not permit myself to range at large, but turn in that direction in which I discovered still greater altitudes. This brings us to the final peak of my musical climbing, and, though it is very narrow, it rises out of the rest of Beethoven with a more abrupt and lofty steepness than any step of all the way by which we have come.

In approaching it, I ask the reader to consider this subtle wee lyric of George Meredith's, which, I dare say, looks more like a puzzle than a poem:

<sup>1</sup> 'La musique lui était devenue impossible. On ne juge bien de l'art que par le malheur. Le malheur est la pierre de touche. Alors seulement, on connaît ceux qui traversent les siècles, ceux qui sont plus forts que la mort. Bien peu résistent. On est frappé de la médiocrité de certaines âmes sur lesquelles on comptait . . . Comme la beauté du monde sonne creux sous le doigt de la douleur!'—Romain Rolland, *Le Buisson ardent*.

'Music had become impossible for him. Only through sorrow can one judge art truly. Sorrow is the touchstone. Then only one recognizes those who endure through the centuries, those who are stronger than death. Very few stand the test. One is astonished at the mediocrity of certain souls on whom one had counted. How hollow the beauty of the world sounds under the touch of pain!'



## WIND ON THE LYRE.

That was the chirp of Ariel  
You heard as overhead it flew,  
The farther going more to dwell,  
And wing our green to wed our blue ;  
But whether note of joy or knell,  
Not his own Father-singer knew ;  
Nor yet can any mortal tell,  
Save only how it shivers through ;  
The breast of us a sounded shell,  
The blood of us a lighted dew.

The obscurity is not so formidable but that we can see light. The chirp of Ariel is, I take it, the rare momentary flash, struck out by the work of art, that achieves almost supernatural expression, communicates unutterable things. It is elusive and intangible ; it is just for a moment in the air. It so far transcends the ordinary range of feeling that the artist himself cannot tell whether he has a perception of joy or of sadness. We only know that it shivers through us, and lifts our mortal earthly life into union with the wide blue of infinity.

In any branch of art we might find ourselves saying, 'That was the chirp of Ariel!'—in Blake, or a Shakespeare song ; it may be frozen into a Winged Victory, or a Venus of Milo—if Munchausen's bugle makes a precedent for such a metaphor. But Meredith describes it in terms of music ; and there, though we might be inclined to seek for the experience among the modern impressionists, Beethoven, I believe, is the Father-singer who has most wonderfully made us know it.

This is the best introduction I can make to the distinguishing quality of certain passages in Beethoven, which may be only a few bars long, but which seem to touch quite a new plane of expression. The music we are concerned with now stands apart from all the rest not because we could say definitely that it is better. We couldn't ; the most inveterate student of technique would feel that all the canons of his art were suspended. Nor even because it is more beautiful. We shall

hardly think of that. If there is a region in morals 'beyond good and evil', it appears there is a region in art beyond beauty. Sometimes we shall decidedly be able to judge 'whether sound of joy or knell', sometimes not even that. Most of our ordinary categories we shall have to leave behind. The one adjective that the plain man who happened to get there would find left to use would probably be 'mystic'; and on his lips it would simply sum up that which transcended his working classifications and standards of comparison.

All that we may be able to say at first, and there is not so very much more that can be said ultimately, is that this music is different. I name at the outset, before going on to further discussion, that example which will give the music-listener the strongest possible sense of its differentiation. It occurs in the pianoforte Trio in B flat, Opus 97. No one who knows the passage will think I am exaggerating. There is no other instance in which the transition is so sudden and striking.

The *Andante cantabile* of this Trio is a set of variations upon a tune so beautiful, and so full of deep desire, that we must count it among Beethoven's greatest :

*semplice.*

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system begins with a treble and bass staff in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major (two sharps). The tempo/mood is marked *semplice.* and the dynamics are *p* (piano). The melody in the treble staff is characterized by dotted rhythms and a simple, plaintive quality. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. The second system continues the piece, ending with a first ending bracket and a 'c.c.' (coda) marking, indicating a transition to a different section.

The variations that follow make lovely meditation on this theme. Then comes its simple repetition, *piano*, with new harmonies, strange and halting. We never hear it end. Just on the last chord something happens. It has gone; the whole foreground has disappeared; the solid earth has vanished, and we are afloat in the aether, among soft billows of sound, while we are permeated, as through some more immediate *rapprochement* than physical hearing, by the murmur of an endless song.

‘The fifth variation’, says Dr. Walker, ‘passes with a kind of faltering awe into a coda of an unearthly purity hardly matched elsewhere even by Beethoven.’<sup>1</sup> ‘Passes’ is not quite adequate to the suddenness and completeness of the transition which leaves earthly things behind. It is like the change in an instant from the sober waking world to the land of dreams in which anything can happen; it is as if the curtain of material reality were blown aside, like so much painted scenery, and behind it, our eyes were opened to the world invisible. Coming out of it, rapt, we understand what it means to ‘wing our green to wed our blue’—before the finale of the Trio breaks in to shatter the spell.

It is to be noted that this Trio is not classified as belonging to Beethoven’s ‘third period’; but it is on the very verge of it, chronologically and technically; and it is only in a few of the third-period works that we come again on passages which are spiritually akin to the coda of the Opus 97 slow movement. I shall speak, in a few minutes, of three of these.

It is most difficult of all to try to characterize or explain, beyond what I have already said, this grouping of passages I am going to make. It is music which, especially when it breaks in suddenly, as in the Trio, seems to show up even the finest context as artificial, man-made stuff, of gross being, in contrast to its own etherealized substance. It gives, by

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Walker, *Beethoven*.



contrast, the impression of being music which is *free* ; there is no constraint of form upon it, no submission to a controlling hand ; it is itself.

Even the greatest music we know has had to submit to be *composed*. It flows in canals of convention, which we ignore because we are accustomed to them, and because it is the creator's task to make the limitations of form appear the self-chosen and inevitable channels of his music's free course. It may be, indeed, as Joachim said: 'Form ist ihm, der sie souverän beherrscht, keine Fessel, sondern Anregung zu immer neuen, ureigenen freien Gestaltungen'—'For him who dominates all its resources, form is no binding fetter, but a spur, an incentive, to new, free designs that are pre-eminently his own.' But, after all, we can well imagine that there is more music within the composer than can ever find utterance. The expert can trace in Beethoven's note-books the development of germ-ideas, their accretion, or their simplification, till they are perfect for use. We see what is gained in the shaping of them for utterance, but let us remember that we don't see what is lost. The composer alone knows what he has had to sacrifice as impracticable, and groans at his impotence to embody in the finished product the glow and the sheen of the vague shapes in which the raw material of his music first came to him. Many an eccentric valuation by a composer of some work of his own may have its explanation in a background to that work which exists for him, and which he has conveyed to no one else.

Perhaps the progressive stages of Beethoven's work represent, not so much a deepening of the sources of music (though, of course, that too), as a growing realization of what it was possible to say in music, and a growing power of translating the inner music into the language and forms of his art without destroying its transcendent qualities.

When I hear the charming little tune from the Opus 14<sup>2</sup> sonata :

*Andante.*

Musical score for "The Rose Tree" in C major, 2/4 time. The score consists of three staves. The first staff contains the first line of music, the second staff contains the second line, and the third staff contains the third line. The music is written in treble clef. The first staff ends with a repeat sign. The second staff begins with a repeat sign. The third staff begins with a repeat sign. The music is marked with *cresc.* and *sf* (sforzando) in the second staff, and *cresc.*, *sf*, and *p* (piano) in the third staff. The piece concludes with a repeat sign and the instruction *&c.*

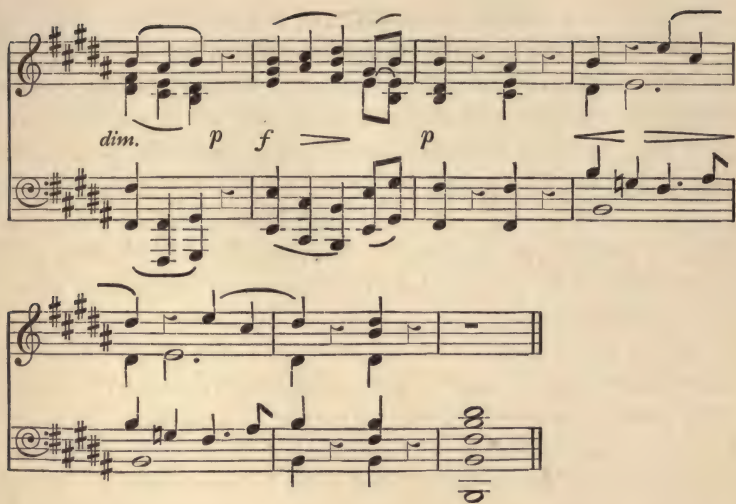
I seem to see beyond it the imminence of a far greater thing—the massive depth and breadth of the glorious theme of the slow movement in the ‘Emperor’ Concerto:

*Adagio un poco mosso.*

*Lullaby*  
 Franz Schubert, Op. 94, No. 4

*p*

*cresc.* *f*



I may be quite off the mark, but it seems to me that, if we went far enough back, this so disparate pair might well be the materializations at different stages of one persistent musical shape or tendency. (The second theme, again, has looming through it, as we shall see, faint shadows of still more exalted things.)

In that case we have a thought of how little the inner music is able to get across the threshold in the language of the first period. That language may give perfect utterance within its limits; but no more than a child's vocabulary can express the child's metaphysical imaginings, except in what seem to us pretty little fancies, can it carry the vast conceptions that brood over the birthplace of inspiration. In the first period—*Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him. But the thunder of his power who can understand?* Or we are reminded again, in a new sense, of the 'midnight ocean's force', impotent to throw up more than a 'faint thin line'.

But, if in the first example given above we hear only the



whisper of the creator Beethoven, in the second the thunder of his power has begun to come through. And so in all the greatest works of the middle period. Mastery of language and form has widened the outlet so that he is able to pour forth what no man had ever before put into music, or dreamt that it was possible to put into music. Yet the outlet is still a strait gateway by which the emotional energies and conceptual shapes are deployed with that stern discipline, and under that tight grip, which are so characteristic of his most memorable utterances.

In the third period the pillars of the gate are broken by the pressure from within. The music, more careless of what it may convey to others, seeks utterance at all costs. The will to express is too strong for the calculating judgement of what, on the old scale, is possible, and what is impossible.

In the result, we have, at the centre, achievements, such as the first movement of the 'Ninth', whose immense horizons, grand strength, strong individualities dwarf even what had gone before. But also by-products. Some useless; a brusque humour, a rough capriciousness pours itself out unchecked; Beethoven sometimes, like the over-charged Christians of the early Church, speaks incoherently, 'with tongues,' not 'for edification'—as witness the grandest sonata of music, Opus 106, marred by a long finale, uncompromisingly ugly and incomprehensibly pointless to nearly all hearers. But sometimes, finally, to round up this digression, among the by-products are results that are the miracles of music. Rare moments come when the inexpressible things find expression; when the inner music, to all appearance, floats out into utterance, unconstrained, free, formless, except in so far as it is a form to itself.

This is a music which is beyond the best, not because it is still more beautiful, but because it seems, as it were, to be emancipated from the ordinary conditions of birth and constraints of embodiment. It is like the primal, essential stuff of which music is made, the uncondensed raw material of music.

If it is a quality of the greatest music that it should sound as if it had always existed, that it should seem to have been not made but discovered, there is no music which satisfies the test so abundantly as this. It is music overheard; the composer himself is a listener.

Now I proceed to some of the other passages I have had in mind in saying these things.

Once, at least, in the Ninth Symphony the music attains emancipation; but not, as in the Trio, by a sudden breaking through; the setting here is such as naturally dissolves into it. With the first notes of the slow movement we feel that Beethoven is in the spirit—so noble is the music, so transparently pure, and of a tenderness that makes an intimacy past belief. Listening, one seems to realize the depth of truth in one of those common words of religion which we use without appreciating more than a fraction of their meaning. Here is a great soul, at the summit of his greatness, 'become as a little child'. At the close of the movement, I have seen charmingly in others exactly what happens in myself—a smile, and then a sigh.

It is in the passage which comes after both subjects have been repeated once in variation that the last contact with the ground is imperceptibly broken, and the music is afloat:

*Adagio.*

Clar.  
Clar.  
Bassoon. *dolce.*  
Horn.

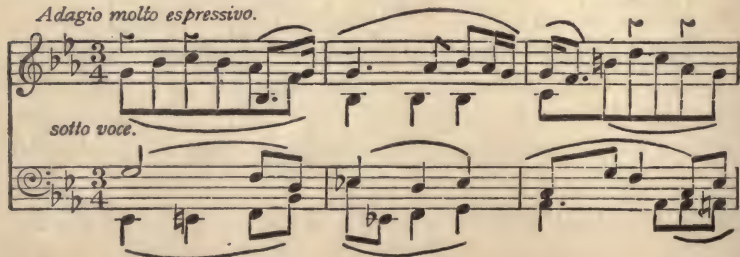
&c.

Only in dear affection does it still hover near our littleness, and use its freedom to come through the barriers of personality, closer than breathing.

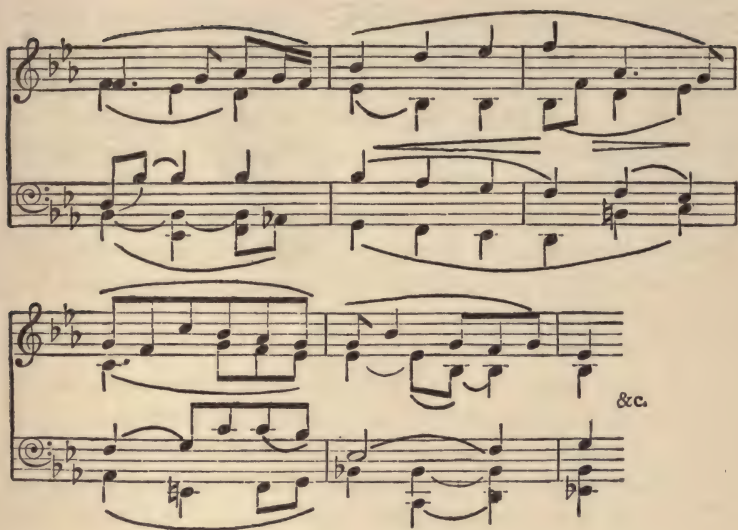
A careful economy of superlatives (almost impossible when the narrative leads straight on from one to another outstanding musical experience) might have some resources of language left against the moment of greatest need. Perfection, we are told, is a word of such serious meaning that a writer should hesitate to apply it. How gladly would one lavish it now, if there could be a trace of adequacy in its negative ascription! One can only make the last plunge, and say that, if a single brief movement were qualified to wear the crown, it is before the Cavatina of the B flat Quartet, Opus 130, that all other music must bow the knee.

Though in many ways it stands by itself, the Cavatina is within the circle of this group, or else the group itself is meaningless. It has a section marked *Beklemmt*, which, with its floating fragments of unearthly song, directly recalls the type of the other passages that have been mentioned. It is not, however, this episode alone, but the whole movement that belongs complete to that order of music which is different from the rest. It is like no other music on that plane. We cannot call it free in the sense of formless; and there is no dimness that gives the feeling of a dream, there is no mistiness in its mystery; it is as clear-cut as crystal. Yet somehow it impresses us as being only the further beyond all earthly limitations. In its very clarity lie the strangeness and intentness of the awe it creates. We hold our breath. That quiet, clear flow of music instantly makes for itself an atmosphere of breathless stillness. It has the still, small voice that is more awesome than storm, or fire, or earthquake. The theme is :

*Adagio molto espressivo.*







I spoke of this music as seeming to have been overheard, rather than put together by faculty of man. The Cavatina stands apart in the direction of a still more complete emancipation, if that were possible. Even a passive human agency would seem to be eliminated. The music, one would have to say, is not properly our possession even to that extent; it is not even conscious of us; remote from our humanity it soars in the void, and sings for itself, as though it were not even overheard. I think it is literally true of the Cavatina, 'whether sound of joy or knell, not his own Father-singer knew'. All that he did know, perhaps, was 'a man (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth); such an one caught up into the third heaven—How that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words'.

It is quite outside my proper province to venture any suggestions that partake of the technical. With even a small thought of the comprehensive and microscopic study that has

been given to Beethoven's themes—their inception and growth in the note-books, their comparative aspects—I fully realize that anything which has occurred to me is about as likely to be novel or helpful as, say, the observations of a schoolboy with a butterfly-net to the Entomological Section of the British Association. Yet with, I hope, the disarming *naïveté* of that schoolboy, I would mention what has seemed to me almost a characteristic of a few of Beethoven's greatest tunes. It arises out of the Cavatina, because there I seem to find it at last in its full-flower form.

What I have in mind is a strong, smooth, ascending impulse in the tune, beginning, as a rule, from the dominant, through three or four more or less consecutive steps of equal time value—usually one full beat to each—which upward movement is the heart of the tune, its moment of most intense life.

Look at the phrase 'B flat, D, E flat, F' in the fifth and sixth bars of the Cavatina theme quoted above. Note how every means of rhythm, and harmony, and melodic preparation and sequel concentrate the emphasis upon it. Allow yourself to feel the effect, and analyse it. We speak of melodic curve, and every tune, of course, must rise and fall; but here there is what I would try to describe as a *breaking upwards* of the line of melody. Subsequent notes take up the thread, but they don't take up all the thread. We perceive that some virtue has gone out of the music; some of its content of feeling has poured upwards, and does not fall back to earth.

This is my perfect example; the nearest parallel to it is in the theme of the B flat Trio slow movement, quoted on p. 65—'A, A, B, C sharp', in almost exactly the same relative position in the tune, and climbing again through one bar to culminate on the initial accent of the next. Of this, most of what I have said is true in a lesser degree; but the fact that the downward fall of the tune after the upward movement happens to take off from a higher note, diminishes, without destroying,

the characteristic effect, which, here too, is the theme's moment of intensest life.

After these examples the idea becomes, perhaps, an obsession in one's mind, and there is a tendency to find the ascending impulse, in a more or less incipient form, all through Beethoven's finest slow themes. Of those ready to hand, because already quoted, there is, for example, the theme from the Opus 109 sonata (p. 54), with its emotional stress on the three even crotchets at the modulation (fourth bar) in the first part of the tune. And there is the great tune from the E flat Concerto (p. 68), pervaded throughout by that upward pressure (bars 3, 7, 8, 9, 11).

What I am claiming is a spiritual characteristic rather than a technical one—that there is a certain sort of feeling in Beethoven which is continually seeking expression in this way. When we have seen its complete unveiling in the Cavatina, we are ready to recognize in that peculiar deep warmth, as of desire or aspiration, which characterizes so many of his themes, a groping after the full utterance, and are predisposed to identify the feature in many cases where the resemblance is of the slightest.

Technically, it has been pointed out that the typical Beethoven tune tends to move by consecutive steps of the scale ('conjunct motion') as against, say, the typical Brahms tune, which tends to move up and down the notes of a chord ('disjunct motion'). From that point of view this feature would seem to be no more than an inevitable by-product. But perhaps the spiritual characteristic rather accounts for the technical mannerism than vice versa. Is it not the upward motion that is most often in consecutive steps, and the downward that relaxes to drop easily through large intervals?

Really, however, this is out of my depth. There remains, at any rate, the unforgettable gesture of the Cavatina—and how lovely it is! how like a flower, lifting its face slowly to the sun, till, with one more supreme movement, it offers itself



altogether, drinking in the light, and exhaling its sweetness upward! And for me it is like the finding at last of a word that Beethoven was trying all his life to think of.

The only other piece of music which I shall put with these is the *Adagio molto* of the A minor Quartet, Opus 132—the last complete work of Beethoven's to be composed. This movement has an unusual interest for the student because of its modal tonality—it is in the Lydian mode. And there is an unusual interest for the ordinary hearer also in the strangeness of its appeal.

Like the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony, it is built up of alternations of two sections, an *adagio* and an *andante*; but the transitions are queerly abrupt, and the contrast is of the sharpest. For the nature of the contrast one is driven back on rather clumsy terms; the *adagio* is profoundly subjective, the *andante* vividly objective.

The former speaks in a language so strange that, at first and it may be for long, we feel that it is baffling, and feel nothing else. So, in the effort to understand a foreign tongue, we may miss not only the meaning of the words, but all the plain expressiveness that speaks to our sympathetic insight. Yet, as the strain to follow relaxes, and we let the slow melody flow over us, and the mysterious harmonies find their echo within, gradually the deeper affinities by which a man understands the things of a man begin to be established between the spirit of the composer and our spirit, and the music, 'one of the most mysterious and elusive movements in existence', begins to yield up some of its message.

As an exception to what I have said above, this is a case in which the downward movement of the melodic line seems to carry most of the significance. What that may be it is hard to apprehend, and when some sort of union does come about between oneself and the music, it is rather deeper in than the place where words come from and things have names. As near as

one word can come, *Peace*, it seems to me, is the burden of it, but in a special sense which 'tranquil' would not fit. It is a peace which is indescribably alive, full of light, full of some large glad energy of perception; 'in tune with the Infinite', the transatlantic phrase might be.

The outlook of the *andante* is radiant—a sunlit world of sparkles and trilling birdsong; a world in which the pulse of joy beats to a rapture, before the whole picture begins to blur and blend in a quiet inward warmth of happiness, leading to the return of the *adagio*. Once again the *andante* breaks in. Then comes the final variation of the *adagio*, and with it has come at times, for me, one of the most strange and delicious of musical adventures.

Many a one among those who read this has known, I dare say, what it is to be lying half-awake, half-asleep, and to hear faint and far-off, like 'horns of elf-land', some one begin to play music that seems perfectly enchanting. Then presently: 'What was that wonderful thing you were playing this afternoon? . . . Oh, was that all!'

Coleridge, trying to put his dream swiftly on paper before it faded, recalled a damsel with a dulcimer:

Could I revive within me  
Her symphony and song,  
To such a deep delight 'twould win me  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

*Would* they say that, the wide-awake people who heard the song revived in sober daylight? I wonder.

Heine, too, in such a dream, flung himself at the feet of the carved Goddess of Beauty: 'Hellenic calm possessed my senses, and over my head, as in benediction, Apollo poured his sweetest strains.' Heine awoke, with the music still ringing in his ears, to find that it was the bells of cows being driven to pasture.

Away back in the golden age, and in those most golden days of it that were summer days of holiday, far north in Scotland, I remember mornings when there was some early ploy toward among birds or beasts or fishes. For such occasions there was in that place a small quaint clock, made to tinkle out a little tune by way of an alarum at the set time. The tune is of no importance; years later I found it was known among men, and called 'The Blue-bells of Scotland'. But even now I can live over again dim dawns when I drifted up out of sleep while it played. By my side there would be the other boy, already awake and crouched with hands clasped round his knees; but I lie still with closed eyes, for it seems there is some mistake; I have broken surface in the wrong world, and the air is full of the heart-breaking strains of angels' music.

Now in all the realm of music the only place where I have ever known in full waking consciousness something of the atmosphere and effect of this experience (evidently far from uncommon) is when the *Adagio molto* reaches its final variation. It does not always come off, and I don't know how or why it does come, except that all over and through this last page of the music is woven a little figure, caught and echoed by each instrument in turn, entering and re-entering:



—a figure so slight that I almost shrink from quoting it in cold blood, when I have also to confess that it is the only tangible



token I can offer for the dizzy sense I have of an ineffable joy in which this strange piece of music culminates.

Further, I have sometimes wondered recently if it would be altogether fantastic to regard the title of this music as a clue to an experience behind it not unlike that which it recalls to me listening. Beethoven wrote over this movement one of his rare titles—'A convalescent's sacred song of thanksgiving to the Divinity.' Is it possible that he knew, and was veritably trying to re-create, such an experience as I have had, and you may have had? When is it so likely to occur as in the softness and dreaminess and deliciousness of convalescence, when one dozes and wakes again, or half-wakes; and the veiled beauty of common sounds becomes naked for one, and all things in the world appear lovely and lovable?

It may pass as a harmless fancy perhaps; but it will not pass as an adequate suggestion with which to leave this grouping I have made of some of the most wonderful fragments of Beethoven's work. Tenderness and joy may come as dream realities to the man who is in a twilight of consciousness, who is passive through weakness or slumber, and whose critical powers are in suspense, and can be in suspense, because life for the moment is static. It is granted, perhaps, that the world may be all lovely and lovable when it is not a sphere of action but of perception; when it is not a world to create in, and react to, not a world for man to change, but solely to enjoy. Yet a drunken or drugged consciousness may find such a heaven. A state of feeling superficially akin to that of much of this music is indicated in a vivid touch with which I once heard a man describe his sensations as he walked through the streets: 'I felt as if everybody in all the world was doing exactly what I wanted him to do.' He was a medical student experimenting with drugs. That day he had taken Indian Hemp; and in the train he had to hold up his newspaper to conceal the benignant smile with which he couldn't help blessing mankind.

Such a vision breaks up and such a glow of feeling departs before the first ray of sober daylight. The gold is straw, the nightingales sparrows, Apollo's lyre a cow-bell, and the angels' song an alarum-clock. But the supreme tenderness and joy which breathe in some of the latest and greatest pages of Beethoven have more than a dream reality. They are salted with fire ; they are the things that abide. The glitter is not straw, but the fine gold of the furnace. There can be fond visions of a blurred consciousness, but there is also a vision that comes in a moment of supernatural clearness, attained through suffering. One cannot leave this music of Beethoven having named only such unreal phantasms as, in our experience, or in the experience of other lesser men, bear the same outward marks, but are as far below the level of everyday reality as the insight of his greatest music is far above it. This, rather, is near it—the great scene in Tolstoi's *War and Peace* which describes the thoughts and emotions of a noble character, as he lies in a military hospital, mortally wounded. He sees a figure beside him which is familiar, but which, in his faintness, he fails to recognize. Every now and then in the midst of the fantastic images of his fever there would come a few minutes when his thoughts had a clearness and depth that they had never had in a normal state. In one such period he knows the man beside him, whose red eyes are fixed on his. It is a fellow officer, his enemy ; one who had robbed him of his wife, and whom he had lived to kill. 'He remembered everything, and tender pitifulness rose up in his heart which was full of peace. He could not control those tears of compassion and charity which flowed for all humanity, for himself, for his own weakness, and for that of this hapless creature. "Yes," he said to himself, "this is the pity, the charity, the love of my neighbour, the love of those that hate us as well as of those who love us, which God preached on earth. . . . This was what I had yet to learn in this life, and what makes me regret it."'

I would cite another scene, in Romain Rolland's famous musical novel, which shows us 'Jean Christophe' lying in the garret where he has toiled at hack-work, and spent himself in the travail of creation, and starved, and fought through a long sickness. By the open window enters the sound of some schoolgirl thumping out her Mozart. Once it would have infuriated him; but now a strange feeling comes to life in the brusque, violent, impulsive nature—a great patience, a tenderness for all little incompetent things. There and then he suddenly knows something: *he has not sufficiently loved.*

That, or something like it, is a picture from fiction, and sentimentalized fiction I am well aware some might class it. Yet I think no one can become intimate with Beethoven (even in that so limited degree, the most that is possible for a non-musician like myself) without feeling that this thing, in one way or another, has happened in fact. We only know it by its fruit, but know none the less certainly, that the moment came when that grand, yet all too human spirit, self-tormented, lonely, stricken, shut out from the sound of his own music, having tasted the bitterest, and known the worst, whispered to himself, 'I have not sufficiently loved'.

That moment came when the time was ripe. Thinking of his art, we would not ask for it sooner. There had to be developed the giant strength; there had to be laid the rock-foundation of sincerity, on which alone enduring work can be built. But into the last phase enters the greatest of the abiding things, in song as in life; and Beethoven came to the innermost secret of the very few, the loftiest, who are the lowliest, artists: *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.*



## § 5

Here, at the summit of Beethoven's achievement, I must let my narrative end. I am not without a fear that I have spoken too exclusively of slow movements, and so, perhaps, thrown out of balance the picture of Beethoven's art. I should have wished to say more than I have done of some of the great first movements. But I have tried to follow a progressive course, and it is difficult now to go on to other things, since this last music remains for me the real end of my pilgrimage. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that music has become narrowed down to a small number of Beethoven's later works. But I do mean that, in the last resort, they are among the things that abide. One may question the reality of the curious pleasure the human animal takes in the arrangement of sounds in certain combinations and successions, and find nothing able to withstand the acid of doubt, but the whole art crumbling up—until one comes, say, to the Cavatina. And there is that which doubt itself cannot succeed in doubting; one knows that, through this, one has to do with something which belongs to eternity. If a mood of scepticism came, so drastic that all art seemed a sort of self-intoxication, all truth a delusion, all goodness an old wives' tale, I think I would find in Beethoven the foundation on which I could rebuild faith in their reality.

There may lie new stages ahead for me. Scriabin may have conquered unknown peaks; what I have called Mozart's pure milk of the word may become my sole delight; or perhaps one is destined ultimately to gravitate to the universal ocean-level of Bach. I cannot tell; after what has happened to my most positive certainties I can affirm nothing for the future.

Indeed, there is one name which I have practically ignored, and many would feel that, until it has been faced, the story of a musical pilgrimage remains unfinished. I myself am con-

scious that it has not, like so many other names, been left aside justifiably, simply in order that the narrative might follow the narrow path of music that happened to be significant from the point of view of progress. I have said nothing of Brahms here because, though there is so much that one could say, the particular sort of thing that this personal record demands I should have had to evade. I don't feel able to say the right word about the significance of Brahms for myself, nor have I ever read, or heard from any one else, what helped me to find it. I play, and take interest in, and enjoy Brahms more often, and at greater length than all other composers put together, except Beethoven, but I don't even know whether I should be counted among 'Brahmins' or 'Anti-Brahmins'. I see the latter casting round for a plausible criticism, hitting now on this, now on that, as the element Brahms lacks. But, no sooner is a quality said to be missing, than it seems to me one which he has in almost superabundance. The former have an easy task in replying to any definite accusation; but, when they have repelled all charges, and triumphantly vindicated Brahms's music against every attempted depreciation, something remains to be explained. For example, the fact that there should be such a persistent effort to identify some deficiency remains to be explained. There may be nothing in that, of course, since a comparatively modern composer is concerned. In any case it is not what impresses me. What I personally want to see accounted for is the fact that one can grow very familiar with this music, and come to know its language and idiom very well, without feeling any real intimacy with the composer. I hear songs that are most exquisitely beautiful and tender, movements that are unspeakably solemn and grand; if I spoke of them I should have to speak of them without any reservation. And yet, somehow, the man behind them remains intangible, and no thoughts of affection or reverence go seeking him.

Beethoven once said that he could kneel by Handel's

grave. Every music-lover will recognize that type of response, and has felt it himself in relation to Mozart, or Bach, or Beethoven, or Schubert ; in homage and in love one reaches out to the personality behind the music. He has delivered himself to us in the most eloquent, the most intimate, the most revealing of all languages ; there is something between us, something that goes back from us to him ; we revere him, we know him so well, we hold him so dear. Does the lover of Brahms's music feel in this way about Brahms ? I do not.

Here and there are traits in Brahms I do not like. There is occasionally a morbid streak of a peculiar ghostly sort ; snaky little tunes, which, in their fastidiousness and intellectualism, are all the more repellent. But that is not my stumbling-block ; it is too minor and too rare a feature to count for any impartial judgement. What holds me up is not what Brahms gives away, but what he does not give away ; not that at his worst he can be repellent, but that at his best he remains enigmatic. In his most lovely transparencies, in his most solemn and mystical moments, in the concentrated energy of his most stirring passages, in those glorious towering structures of modulations that are all his own,—through it all there remains for me something ambiguous in his art. I can see no deficiencies in his work ; it seems to me that there is nothing he cannot do. Yet it is as though he possessed all things without ceasing to possess himself ; as if he gained his life without losing it. He doesn't, in the fullest sense of the word, *deliver* himself in his music.

I may be all wrong, I may be standing too near. Possibly if I had lived in the first half of the nineteenth century I should have felt the same thing about Beethoven. Some day I may very deeply regret having written such foolishness. But if that time comes I shall eat my words, as the reader has already seen me doing more than once. For the present they are as near to the truth of my feeling as I can get. I cannot ignore Brahms ; he is of enormous importance. I don't want to



ignore him ; I am not such an idiot as not to find immense interest and delight in his music ; it fills a very large place in the immediate foreground for me. But something is lacking between him and me ; his real significance remains unseizable as yet—perhaps he knocks the bottom out of music, perhaps he knocks the lid off ; but in any case I cannot get clear what his music means for myself (which, as I explained at the beginning, is the sole criterion of this book), and consequently, though he is such an important figure, I have not been able to assign to Brahms his place in my pilgrim's progress.

## § 6

I do not know if I have been able to prove that this way of writing about music (the register of its impressions on a single personality) has a value of its own. I feel it ought to have. The narrative can be taken in its facts and sequence as strictly truthful, though it may be in danger of giving a deceptively definite picture of the nature of musical growth. Of course, music does not pass into and out of the field of appreciation with quite the steady successional march of scenery across the frame of a railway-carriage window.

The great danger of every non-technical book about music is the temptation to gush generalities. Music has suffered sadly from it. The writer sees and accepts an invitation to spread himself, and proceeds to do it with gusto. Descriptive writing about music, I think, is too often like the descriptions with which novelists, especially French novelists, usher in their woman characters. In both cases the writer has a sort of glow, and feels that he is enriching the world ; but the glow is only the glow of the original in his mind ; there is none of it in his pages. Some neatness of phrasing may be coolly admired there ; but only too probably, in the case of music, he has been betrayed into large vague rhetoric, thinking that the breath and heat of beauty were there to fill it out, and, failing them,

has contributed not even to literature, but cumbered both it and music with another volume of emptiness.

If I myself hardly seem to be in a position to speak on the point, at least, by doing so, I show myself aware of the danger. I may say that, being aware of it, I have rather particularly tried to be always speaking to some definite idea; and, however much I've let myself go, I hope some germ of thought will be found in every case—if it's only like the tiny larva at the centre of those blobs of froth known as cuckoo-spit. I appreciate the fitness and safety of writing about the greatest things of music with the maximum of reticence, as serious musicians write about them, when it is necessary to write at all. On the other hand, granted that it was worth while to make an attempt to put on record as revealingly as possible the experiences and impressions of an individual, I believe that it is just those who know the music best who will be the last to accuse me of over-statement, and of exaggerated fancy. I will not for a moment plead guilty to that. As it happens, I have been able, in a small way, to apply a sort of test. As these pages go to press it is over six months since I was writing the Beethoven section of this narrative. At that time I was specially soaking myself in those works and movements of which I have spoken most. By a natural reaction they were immediately afterwards sent to Coventry. A few days ago it happened that I heard one of them played. I came home and replayed it; and then some of the others. At point after point the feelings and fancies I have tried to set down in this book were so strongly renewed, that I wished only I had at my disposal some literary device, like the little figures <sup>2</sup> or <sup>3</sup> which the mathematician writes above the line, signifying that the statements are to be squared or cubed.

It is necessary to add a word of warning for the reader who may be an outsider like myself. Don't imagine you can go straight into the inmost places and be satisfied with what you

find there. You may read through this record in an hour or two, but in the living it has covered something over a dozen years; and if I'd been presented with my own complete manuscript at the beginning of that period I don't know that the tale of years would have been very much shortened. I never feel so hopeless and helpless as when a person of little or no musical experience asks, after listening to a lecture on Beethoven, for a hearing of one of those works that have been spoken of in such glowing terms. A disappointment is almost inevitable. The difficulty of Beethoven's last sonatas and quartets from the appreciation point of view can be, and is, very much exaggerated; there are plenty of things in them which are as immediate and direct in their appeal as music well could be. None the less, before one can even come in sight of the depths and heights of the greatest things, and possess all that they have to give, there must be a long apprenticeship; through perhaps years of development one must grow to meet them, to be ready for them, almost to need them; music must have come to fill a very large place in our world, to have been woven gradually into the texture of our most serious life, as I have tried to show happening in my own case—music, through Chopin, capturing first my senses, then, through Wagner, invading my whole thought and intellectual outlook, and, finally, penetrating to the very roots of life, intertwining with those faiths and intuitions that are at the centre of our being. Even then, if you are like me, it will be nearer the fiftieth hearing than the first before some of these things begin to come through.

It is not hard, therefore, to understand why some of the greatest music should be the least performed. It is not hard to understand, though it is startling, that there should be many people, who would describe themselves as 'musical', who have never once heard, for example, a single 'third period' work of Beethoven. It is possible to attend at pianoforte recitals for half a lifetime and never hear one of the last five Sonatas;



or to be familiar with the third, fifth, sixth, and seventh Symphonies, without having heard the ninth; or even to hear a good deal of chamber-music and never meet one of the late Quartets. It is not the fault of the artists. Of what profit would an occasional single hearing be to the ordinary person? None, certainly, to me.

Yet I believe, from my own experience—the crude feelings with which I approached music, the ignorance of its science and the incapacity for its technique in which I remain—that there is hardly any one susceptible to music at all, not the errand-boy whistling in the street, not the little girl strumming for her own delight, but would ultimately find their greatest satisfaction in the greatest music—if in some way they could be given the chance to work up to it and grow intimate with it.

In rooms where I lived with a player-piano, my landlady came in impulsively one evening, most deeply moved, with tears in her eyes, hardly able to express herself about such 'wonderful music'. The particular piece of music which had meant so much for her, whenever she had recently heard it, till finally she had to speak about it, was the *Adagio sostenuto* of the Opus 106 Sonata—music that is commonly regarded as reserved for the elect. She had lived with it for a year or more, and at last Beethoven had spoken to her, as he spoke to me, and as he is waiting to speak to so many, if they only had the chance to hear and would learn to listen.

Music is the most universal in its appeal of all the arts, if it is only through a barrel-organ, or a savage's tom-tom, or even a drawing-room ballad that it comes into the lives of people. Music is the most democratic art, and at the same time the most exclusive; it has the broadest base, and, at the top, it has the narrowest apex. In music there are fewer who know and love the best things than in any other art. What we have to do is to turn music from a pyramid into a tower. How are we to widen out that esoteric summit, and lead to it the many who would find there the deepest meaning and joy of life?

The more I think of it the more I feel that the biggest hope lies in the player-piano. It opens out such great possibilities that I have wished it were not at the command of money, to be played so atrociously that its name becomes a reproach, or to stand idle in grand houses, and find its highest usefulness as an accessory for an impromptu dance. When one sees such degradation and waste of its magical powers, one longs that the whole supply might be commandeered, and issued by an all-wise musical Providence to men and women here and there (I could send in several names) in whose lives it would make a simply incredible difference.

For my own part I give thanks without ceasing to the discoverers and creators of it. It has opened the gates of one avenue to reality that would have been for ever closed to me. The only experience with which its advent can be compared, and has often been compared, is a bookish boy's first discovery of the world that reading opens up. Seriously, I believe that such an invention may yet enlarge the life of common men (those, I mean, not experts and specialists in music, as there were in the Middle Ages experts and specialists in manuscripts) almost as much as the invention of printing did. Sometimes I think of all the lovely things of which the story-makers used to dream in the old days—magic carpets, helmets of invisibility, inexhaustible purses, touchstones that turned everything to gold. And I declare solemnly and deliberately that if I had the choice of all such miraculous treasures, and a player-piano were added to the list, I should unhesitatingly ask for it, as by far the most profitable miracle of them all.

## § 7

I rather want the last word of this book to be about Beethoven, if the reader can stand any more; and I find one further thing to say, touching his place, not only now in the world of music, but as compared with the great masters of

other spheres of art. Music has not a monopoly of—to take the name I have already borrowed from Meredith—‘the chirp of Ariel’. In other arts, too, those flashes are struck out, those ultra-rays that seem to come from the primal stuff of music, or poetry, or vision in colour or form; those moments of transcendent expression that pass beyond the range of calculated effect and conscious use of means on the part of the artist, and beyond the range of definite, nameable emotion on the part of the percipient. In this rarefied region the greatest seers seem to me to become dimly comparable, across the division-lines of art; and it is here that the uniqueness of Beethoven becomes shadowed for me against all others. To make one wild shot at what I mean, I might put it thus: that sometimes the significance of words or colour or form goes out into the ultra-violet; but only music, and perhaps only his music, has ever reached into the ultra-red. Beethoven’s music, when the rare moment arrives, goes off the visible spectrum at the other end from that beyond which art has sometimes floated into emancipation. When, through a voice of words, or through a touch bestowed of hand or brush, there has passed over us as we read or gazed the breath of the inexpressible thing, it has been travelling away from what is warm and human and intimate. It has made us feel a hunger. The quality of it was the quality of the world at dawn—the world to which the Poet stretches out his arms and craves to gather or be gathered by it; but it will not, for all his craving; it escapes from him outward to the horizon on every side.

Maiden still the morn is; and strange she is and secret;  
Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells.

In all art, music alone, and in all music, it seems to me, Beethoven alone, has been able to pursue the intimacy and tenderness of life, and all those feelings which would normally be emphasized only unto the grossness and falsities of sentimentalism, out into the infinite. So that they are disembodied,



and we could not, except in our groping to describe, strictly use such a word as 'tenderness' of them; and yet know that they are the effluence of it. We must call these miraculous moments of expression 'remote', as we call them in other artists; we have no other word for the Cavatina, singing in the void; but what we really mean is the direct contrary: they are remote in their infinite nearness.

'The chirp of Ariel' may be, and indeed suggests, what Milton called in Shakespeare 'his native wood-notes *wild*'. Then for Beethoven I must think of those swallows, no less ethereal creatures, which nested outside a child's bedroom window, and whose soft movement in the night, and low twitter of sweet contentment, shivered through him, and made his breast a sounded shell, his blood a lighted dew. Chopin, and a host of poets and painters and music-makers, have materialized that tenderness; but only the great Father-singer has ever made it dissolve and roll away, to reveal behind it a vista of endless reality.

If your critical faculty at this point, or before this, suggests to you, the reader, that I am evolving clouds of words, I ask you to think, if you know them, of those passages I have mentioned, as I am thinking of them most intently all the time: the coda of the Opus 97 *Andante*; the fragment from the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony; the Cavatina; the last variation of the 'Song of Thanksgiving'.

Other art, when it floats free, floats outward through the quality of the dawn, Beethoven's, inward, through the unutterable intimacies of a world that the evening gathers home. Sappho sang of the evening bringing together what the morn had separated—lovely undying words:

Ἑσπερε πάντα φέρων, ὅσα φαίνολις ἐσκέδασ' αὖτως,  
φέρεις οἶν, φέρες αἶγα, φέρεις ἅπυ ματέρι παῖδα.

And in those rare and brief moments of Beethoven's music, when the last garments of mortality are shed, and all gross being is purged away, the song set free is the soul of what

once, in an earthly world, gleamed from a cottage window through the dusk, and glowed red on the hearthstone. Beethoven reveals in the heavens a house eternal, not made with hands.

# INDEX

## OF COMPOSERS AND MUSIC MENTIONED

	PAGE
BACH . . . . .	1, 2, 52, 82, 84
BEETHOVEN	
Pianoforte Concerto, G major . . . . .	45
"        "        E flat ('Emperor') . . . . .	45, 68-69, 75
Overture, Leonora No. 3 . . . . .	48
Quartet, op. 130 . . . . .	72-75, 91
"        op. 132 . . . . .	76-79, 91
Sonata, op. 10 <sup>3</sup> . . . . .	52, 53
"        op. 14 <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	67-68
"        op. 31 <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	52
"        op. 53 ('Waldstein') . . . . .	47
"        op. 57 ('Appassionata') . . . . .	49, 51, 61
"        op. 81 ('Les Adieux') . . . . .	49
"        op. 101 . . . . .	54
"        op. 106 . . . . .	48, 50-51, 70, 88
"        op. 109 . . . . .	54, 75
"        op. 110 . . . . .	54-59
"        op. 111 . . . . .	61-63
Symphony, Third ('Eroica') . . . . .	7
"        Fourth . . . . .	48
"        Fifth ('C minor') . . . . .	26, 48, 54
"        Seventh . . . . .	88
"        Ninth . . . . .	70, 71
Trio, op. 97 . . . . .	48, 65-66, 74, 91
BRAHMS . . . . .	75, 83-85
Pianoforte Concerto, D minor . . . . .	45
CHOPIN	
Ballade, G minor . . . . .	8
"        F major . . . . .	14, 43-44
"        A flat . . . . .	8
"        F minor . . . . .	21
Barcarolle . . . . .	21
Berceuse . . . . .	9-10
Étude, E major . . . . .	27



CHOPIN (*cont.*)

PAGE

Fantaisie . . . . .	21, 22
Impromptu, F sharp . . . . .	8
Nocturne, E flat . . . . .	8, 9
„ G minor . . . . .	11
„ G major . . . . .	14
Polonaise, A flat . . . . .	8
Prélude, op. 28, No. 15 . . . . .	8
„ „ No. 17 . . . . .	8
„ „ No. 23 . . . . .	27
„ op. 45 . . . . .	21
Scherzo, B flat minor . . . . .	8
Sonate, op. 35 . . . . .	5-7

## DEBUSSY

Arabesques . . . . .	35
Et la Lune descend sur le Temple qui fut . . . . .	36
Jardins sous la Pluie . . . . .	35
La Cathédrale engloutie . . . . .	34, 36, 37
L'Après-midi d'un Faune . . . . .	33
Pelléas et Mélisande . . . . .	31-32
Soirée dans Grenade . . . . .	35

GOUNOD . . . . . 2

HANDEL . . . . . 83

MENDELSSOHN . . . . . 22

Lieder ohne Worte . . . . . 7

MOZART . . . . . 1, 22, 82, 84

SCHUBERT . . . . . 22, 84

## SCHUMANN

Pianoforte Concerto . . . . . 45

SCRIABIN . . . . . 52

STRAUSS . . . . . 52

STRAVINSKY . . . . . 52

## TCHAIKOVSKY

Pianoforte Concerto, B flat minor . . . . . 45-46

Symphony, Fifth . . . . . 43

„ Sixth ('Pathétique') . . . . . 43, 57

Trio . . . . . 42

## WAGNER

Götterdämmerung . . . . . 32, 40

Lohengrin . . . . . 23

Parsifal . . . . . 39-41, 55

Tannhäuser . . . . . 23

Tristan und Isolde . . . . . 23-26, 40, 50

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